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Dartagnan's fa

Buckingham = queen's lover

Vicent de Rochefort = cardinal's
Chief leader
defender

Mr. de Treville - head over 3 musketeers

Athos 30 yrs
Lady [illegible] [illegible] [illegible]
handsome
grandure admire
easy to be w/

Porthos 7 big, heavy
fun, fun-loving
story-teller

Aramis handkerchief 1236
wounded, revs.

NEW CENTURY LIBRARY

THE THREE MUSKETEERS

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Bernajoux, rushing blindly, spitted himself upon D'Artagnan's sword.

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The Three Musketeers

By

Alexandre Dumas

Thomas Nelson and Sons
New York

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ALEXANDRE DUMAS.

By Andrew Lang.

IT is certain that the great contemporary popularity of an author does not prove his greatness. In verse, as in the cases of Tupper and Montgomery, in the fustian of some contemporary novelists from which the Muse averts her eyes, we have proof that what is adored to-day by the multitude is burned to-morrow. Alexandre Dumas is, so to speak, burned to-day by the contempt of very superior persons, French and English. They want a different kind of fiction, and make no allowance for tastes that are not their own, or for historical conditions. Nobody says that there should be no novels but novels like those of Dumas. His age produced Balzac, Thackeray, Mérimée, Dickens, all very unlike him, and all excellent. One star varieth from another in glory, but all are bright. Dumas is as widely read as ever, all the world over; he was appreciated by George Sand and by Thackeray. "I have read about our friend Monseigneur Athos, Count de la Fère, from sunrise to sunset with the utmost contentment of mind. He has passed through how many volumes? Forty? Fifty? I wish for my part there were a hundred more," says Thackeray. So do I.

Stevenson abounded in Thackeray's sense. Of the last and longest of the cycle of the Three Musketeers, *The Vicomte de Bragelonne*, R. L. S. wrote:—

"What other novel has such epic variety and nobility of incident? Often, if you will, impossible; often of the order of an Arabian story; and yet all based in

human nature? Not studied with the microscope, but seen largely in plain daylight with the natural eye? What novel has more good sense and gaiety and wit and unflagging, admirable literary skill? And once more, to make an end of commendations, what novel is inspired with a more unstrained or a more wholesome morality? There is no quite good book without a good morality; but the world is wide, and so are morals. . . . And above all, in this last volume, I find a singular charm of spirit. It breathes a pleasant and a tonic sadness, always brave, never hysterical. Upon the crowded, noisy life of this long tale, evening gradually falls, and the lights are extinguished, and the heroes pass away one by one. One by one they go, and not a regret embitters their departure: the young succeed them in their places, Louis Quatorze is swelling larger and shining broader, another generation and another France dawn on the horizon; but for us and these old men whom we have loved so long, the inevitable end draws near, and is welcome. To read this well is to anticipate experience. Ah, if only, when these hours of the long shadows fall for us in reality and not in figure, we may hope to face them with a mind as quiet."

We know the story of the little Spanish boy, moping in France. Did he want his father? No; his father beat him. His sister? No; she was dead. What he wanted was *The Three Musketeers*, which he had begun to read in Spain.

Omne tulit punctum: Dumas won every vote but the vote of the envious. He made me happy, when a not particularly contented schoolboy. I read him as often as Byron read the Waverley novels, and, like these, Dumas improves at each time of reading. I read *La Reine Margot* in French, and then—read it in English. There was nothing better to be had. The heartiness, the large light, the loyalty, the tolerance, the wit, the brilliant and varied sequel of adventures rejoice the heart, and carry us out of our own times and troubles into an enchanted world. We reap the joys of it without

the perils, we run no risk of being martyred for our religion or want of religion; of being poisoned with a rose or a book, or spitted with a very long rapier. We see Catherine de Medici, walking like a wolf through the blood and the dead men in the dusky galleries of the Louvre, but she will not drop *us* down an *oubliette*. We may be ever so old, but the blood of D'Artagnan animates us in fancy, a thing "to make an old man young."

The *raffinés* of to-day think there is too much fighting in Homer, think that the *Iliad* has "a second-rate subject" (fact!), deplore the lack of "female interest." No wonder that they sneer at Dumas. He is not "up-to-date." His style is not precious: it is only a very clear, animated style, swift and glittering as the sword of Aramis. My point is that, in this world of ours there have been a large number of dates. Dumas may not be "up to" ours, of which we have, perforce, quite enough, with two thousand up-to-date novels yearly to aid the newspapers to rub it in. Dumas is "up to" a number of other dates and the bloom of them. He is "up to" love, daring, friendship, loyalty: like "the man Heracles" in Homer, he is "conversant with great adventures." We can have no epic poem of our own, the time is past, but Dumas gives us epic prose. As Homer was "the sun of Greece," lighting up a world that, but for him, would have been invisible to the Greeks of the historical ages, so Dumas is the sun of the old worlds of France.

The studious can discern them yet, in the pages of original *Mémoires*, but the multitude can see them in the light of Dumas. Give him a few pages of the French *Mémoires* of the sixteenth or seventeenth centuries, and he will make the dry bones live, and clothe them in silk and satin, in the golden baldric of Porthos, and the diamonds of Buckingham and of Anne of Austria. There are smiles on beautiful dead lips, light in the eyes that have long been dust, love in hearts that beat no more; hatred, desire, and plot repeople the dusty cavities of skulls

Dumas is not forgotten, time cannot harm him, *la Mort n'y mord!* When *Cyrano de Bergerac* was acted in London some years ago, the player with the part of D'Artagnan had only to cross the stage and utter two lines. Enthusiasts applauded, hands were clapped, perhaps to that gentleman's surprise. The house was not applauding him but Dumas, was welcoming the great D'Artagnan whom we knew, our old friend, ready at need. He is even more dear to us than Dugald Dalgetty or Lesly le Balafré. As for Porthos, Dumas wept when he wrote the story of the death of that Titan. Observe how Porthos grows in the affection of Dumas, as Mr. Pickwick grows on Dickens. In *The Three Musketeers* he is but strong and stupid; his affair of love is distasteful; we are reminded of one amour of Tom Jones, which justly shocked Colonel Newcome. But Porthos develops such qualities of simplicity and loyalty as he grows older, that we do not wonder when, for him, Aramis weeps through a night—Aramis who has abused his friendship, and brought him to his doom.

The great qualities of Dumas, invisible to whippersnappers, were very apparent to one of their idols, Dante Gabriel Rossetti. His favorites among the novels were, says his brother, *Monte Cristo, Les Trois Mousquetaires, Bragelonne, L'Ingénue, Les Quarante-Cinq, La Tulipe Noire* (also a favorite with Thackeray), and *Le Père Olifus*. For *Monte Cristo* I would substitute *Vingt Ans après*, with the Musketeers for the heroes. *Olifus* is not recommended to the young; *L'Ingénue*, of the French Revolution, I have not read.

Nobody has been the Boswell or Lockhart of Alexandre Dumas; he wrote few letters; he has no "Life and Letters." His own *Mémoires* are among the most interesting and amusing of his works, but they describe only the early part of his career. He was the son of a young Republican general, a man of great clemency, and of enormous physical strength, who soon broke with Napoleon and retired from active service. The father was the son of the Marquis Alexandre Davy de

la Pailleterie, who married in San Domingo (he really seems to have married her) a negress named Louise Dumas. The father of the novelist, again, in 1792, married an innkeeper's daughter at Villers-Cotterets, where Alexandre was born on July 24, 1802. His color was very dark, his hair very crisp; no one could take him for an Aryan of blue blood. His father died young, his mother was in humble circumstances, and the education of Dumas was mainly that which an eager boy gives himself, by reading the books that he enjoys. At the age of thirteen, in June 1815, Dumas saw Napoleon pass through Villers-Cotterets "on that path where his sorrows were to be," and saw him returning from Waterloo. Later, Dumas' young friend, De Leuven, had a taste for literature and the stage, which infected the young quadroon, who now learned Italian and German. He marched to Paris, paying his way by the game which he shot, so he says, and in Paris he saw the famous Talma act, and was introduced to him. After three days he went home, where his employer dismissed him as a truant clerk. He returned to Paris. General Foy obtained for him a small clerkship in the household of the Duc d'Orléans, and he gave his leisure to study and to essays in literature. He read Byron, Scott, and Shakespeare in translations, and on his broad shoulders fell the mantle of Scott, reshaped in the French fashion; while from Shakespeare he learned that plays need not be written in the manner of Corneille and Racine. Victor Hugo was making the same discovery. Romance was in the air, but Dumas was never a romanticist of the circle of Hugo, or of Theophile Gautier; he was of no "school" but his own. In 1825–26 he was part author of a play which was acted, and of some short stories, whereof, he says, but four or six copies found purchasers. In 1827 he saw *Hamlet* acted by English players; he knew the piece through a translation, and he was a new man henceforth. A picture at the Salon introduced him to the history of Christina of Sweden, and his play, *Christine*, was accepted by the Comédie

impossibility is caused by the geography of Dumas. He took a great deal of trouble often, he says, in visiting the scenes where his adventures were to occur, but he does not seem to have looked at a map of England, and was hopelessly confused between Tweed and Tyne, Berwick and Newcastle. Only pedants are vexed by such inaccuracies; Dumas, even when he makes D'Artagnan kidnap Monk and carry him to Charles II. in the Netherlands, does not take such liberties with history as Scott permits himself in *Kenilworth* and *Ivanhoe* and *Peveril*. You cannot go further in the way of freedoms with history than Scott, when he resuscitates a lady, Amy Robsart, who has been dead for some fifteen years, or makes Shakespeare a famous dramatist in Queen Elizabeth's train at a date when, in fact, he was "creeping like snail unwillingly to school." But Scott, in later editions, confessed his guilt, and kindly supplied true dates for readers who cared nothing for dates, cared only for the story and the characters.

Dumas never took the trouble to educate his public by aid of historical notes and introductions. History to him was a mass of plastic material. He gave the spirit and atmosphere of an age, often purifying it considerably. As to the end of the Mousquetaires, old men, but as adventurous and muscular as ever; as to *Le Vicomte de Bragelonne*, I do not think of it quite so enthusiastically as Mr. Stevenson. D'Artagnan is better than ever, with his schoolboy honor, which makes him quarrel with young Louis XIV. when the king does not display the high temper and loyalty of a schoolboy. D'Artagnan's duty as Captain of the Mousquetaires com-els him to keep a close eye on Aramis, who has the t Secret, the secret of "the Man in the Iron Mask," uses it for his own purposes as General of the Jesuits ally of Fouquet. Can anything be more enthral- than the chapters in which Aramis, by the most stable means, gets the generalship, and produces a et worth far more than those of his competitors?

We are never told what the secret of the Highland

aird was: did it concern the birth of Monmouth, or of James de la Cloche, self-styled eldest son of Charles II.? Dumas might have made much of that subtlest and most mysterious of adventurers, de la Cloche; but could not, like a recent writer, have identified him with the Man n the Iron Mask. Dumas has another Mask—Philip, he twin brother of Louis XIV. These are great scenes when Aramis places Philip in the royal bedchamber, nd Louis in the Mask and in the Bastille. "A good plot, good friends!" pity it is not true. But the man who later wore the mask (a mere *valet* he was, in fact) was not arrested and consigned to secret prison for life till several years after the date when Dumas' Mask plays his part. That is another little freedom with history that our author allows himself to take, "and what for no?"

In this novel D'Artagnan excels Sherlock Holmes in reconstructing in the dark, with a lantern, the events of the night duel between De Guiche and De Wardes, from minute traces. His capture of Fouquet is worthy of him n his best days, and worthy is his glorious death with he new baton of a Maréchal of France in his hand.

Porthos, too, has mellowed into his great self, and Aramis has gone daringly down his night-wandering way. But Athos has become too like Colonel Henry Esmond in his least happy moments, *le vieillard, comme l a baissé.* The loves of Raoul and Mdlle. la Vallière are far indeed from being over-stimulating; Raoul is not a success, but La Vallière's love of the young king s very tenderly handled. In this novel Dumas shows hat he can do what he seldom cares to attempt—paint andscape admirably, as in the description of the summer night in the woods when Philip escapes from the Bastille. But there are passages which may be skipped by a judicious student.

The old question insists on being asked, how much did Dumas owe to the collaboration of Maquet, who, in he romantic group, called himself Augustus MacKeat. He may have heard of Keats. Dumas met the discon-

solate and unsuccessful Maquet with his unaccepted tal
Le Bonhomme Buvat. He took it, and turned it into t
successful *Chevalier d'Harmental.* The difference in t
titles is characteristic and explains all. Dumas cou
take any material and "give it *that*," as Turner sai
make it live, make it go. The idea of *Monte Cristo* w
Dumas', the sequence of the hero's revenges for h
imprisonment; but Maquet is said to have suggest
the writing of the prison scenes, which are by far t
best portion of the book. Apparently Maquet look
out for subjects, made researches, made objectio
talked the matter over with Dumas, probably he "block
out" scenes which the master retouched. Maqu
without Dumas could do no great work; Dumas cou
work literary miracles without Maquet. Still, the ye
of their association (1844–51) are the years of all t
very best of Dumas' novels; of the Valois cycle (
*Reine Margot, La Dame de Monsoreau, Les Quara
Cinq*), and of the best of the novels of the period of
Revolution.

Deserted by Maquet, Dumas took up a novel wh
was to have been historical, and needed research, *A
Pitou*, and made it an autobiographical tale of his c
early years. He was deep in debt. He had built
own Abbotsford, Monte Cristo, filled it with gue
parasites, and dogs (he had fourteen), and had geni
ruined himself. He by no means followed Scott's
ample by working himself to death that he might
his creditors. Maquet was among them, for large arr
of pay; but Maquet, at all events, had been a consi
able gainer in the past. James Ballantyne, if he
losses through Scott, without Scott would not have
years of wealth. Maquet was in a similar situatio
regard to Dumas.

Retiring to Brussels before the face of his credi
in 1851, Dumas manufactured novels and other w
—*Mes Bêtes* and *Le Capitaine Pamphile* are among
most interesting—and, no doubt, he superintended
work of many "hands."

Everything was material to him; he threw everything, as his son said, into the fire of his genius. We may like him most in his "romances of cloak and sword," we may even wish that he had taken up Mr. Stanley Weyman's favourite period, the later life of Henri IV.—his youth is magnificently handled in the Valois cycle, where Henri is in the toils of Catherine de Medici, in the shambles of the Louvre, in the intrigues of the Duc d'Anjou, at the siege of Carcassonne. But a man—especially a man like Dumas—cannot always be working at one vein. As he says in the preface to *Conscience*: "As one gets on in life, and, losing sight of the cradle, draws nigh to the tomb, it seems as if the invisible ties which bind one to one's birthplace grow stronger and more irresistible. . . . A man's life is divided into two distinct parts: the first thirty-five years are for hope; the second thirty-five for memory. . . . That is why, instead of always breaking fresh ground in literary work, consulting solely the caprices of my fancy, the resources of my imagination, ever seeking new characters and conceiving new, unheard-of situations, I return at times, at last in thought, to that beaten track, my childhood, retracing those days to their earliest hours, looking back along the path I have trodden, back until I see my little feet as they kept pace with my dearly loved mother's—which have traversed life side by side with mine from the day when my eyes first opened, to the day when hers closed for ever." *

He might have made endless romances out of his own adventures, but he mainly kept these for his *Mémoires*, a treasure of wit, anecdote, and reminiscence.

One topic at least was essentially his own; he had found it in his youth in an old French chronicle accidentally opened. That theme was the romance of the Valois Court, and in his play *Henri III.*, he at once showed how he could handle it. The three romances of it at court, with the brief novel *L'Horoscope*, are master-

* The translation is by Mr. H. A. Spurr, and is quoted from his *Life and Writings of Alexandre Dumas*. Dent. 1902.

pieces. *L'Horoscope* must not be neglected. The scene of the two independent would-be assassins, each of whom finds the other lurking under the bed of a king, and their conversation in the dark is extremely humorous. We wish that Dumas had told us more of the fortunes of his Robert Stewart, a mysterious real personage, charged with an attempt to poison Mary Stuart in her early days in France. But the characters and incidents in the three great romances are of unequalled variety and interest. We have the unhappy Charles IX., his passions, his remorse, the heart of good in this thing congenitally evil; his brother, Henri III., more guilty than he of the Bartholomew massacre, and a *décadent*, moral and religious, of the worst kind; yet brave in his early youth, as a swordsman the equal of the matchless Chicot the gentleman-jester. Whether with sword bare, or with tongue free; whether drinking with Gorenflot—that delightful monkish rogue, better than anything in Rabelais, and only lower than Falstaff—or preaching Gorenflot's sermon to the Leaguers; or with Henri IV in war; or discovering the mystery of the voice that haunted the chamber of Henri III.—in fact, always, and in every situation, Chicot is as masterly in his way as D'Artagnan. He has given us medicines to make us love him.

The women—Catherine de Medici, her daughter, La Reine Margot, the charming Madame de Saint-Luc, the piteous fortunes of the Dame de Monsoreau—are on a level with the heroes. It is interesting, in comparison with Dumas' *brave Bussy* to read Chapman's tragedy on the same subject; full, as it is, of superfluous ghosts and severely condemned by Dryden. The death of Bussy, fighting one man against thirty (a thing deemed impossible by Major Bellenden in *Old Mortality*) is one of the great battle-pieces of romance, like the last fight of Grettir the Strong in the Icelandic saga.

Dumas at his best is the greatest of saga-men, teller of romantic tales with a basis in history. It is usual to compare him with Scott, who, in modern times, redis

covered the lost art of historical romance, and handed the secret on to Dumas. The Frenchman has advantages; he takes care not to give too much historical explanation (a terror to the modern reader); he avoids pompous speeches; he does not begin on a lower level of interest, which Scott even thought desirable, as in *Waverley* and *Quentin Durward;* he leaps into his subject, like Homer, and carries you away at once. He has far more wit and speed than Scott; but he has not more humor, he has not such varieties of character. Both excel in kings, but Henri III. is not better drawn than Scott's James VI. and Louis XI., and, I think I may add, Oliver Cromwell. You cannot find in Dumas a Jeanie Deans, a Cuddy Headrig, an Andrew Fairservice, a Bailie Nicol Jarvie, a Nantie Ewart; one might name scores of such freely and masterfully designed minor persons in Scott for whom Dumas has no equivalents. Bessie Maclure, in *Old Mortality*, is as much out of Dumas' way as Chicot is out of Scott's. It is not fair to argue as if there were many passages of flat matter in Scott, and none in Dumas—many of his novels the reader can easily lay down. Byron said that he had read the Waverley novels forty or fifty times—meaning, of course, very frequently—and Byron was not too easily pleased. Scott is said to lack passion. Nobody could make that charge against the volcanic Byron; but he could not, given the chance, have read Dumas more often than he read Sir Walter. He quotes him in his later years, as he quotes Shakespeare, constantly.

Now people, however much they may enjoy Dumas, do not find, as Scott found with Shakespeare, and Byron with Scott and Shakespeare, that his words come spontaneously to their lips and pens. Seldom indeed does any writer illustrate his meaning and adorn his page with a quotation from Dumas. His phrases do not pass into proverbs, though his characters, being French, are more widely appreciable than Sir Walter's Highlanders and Lowlanders. In construction of plot, Dumas at his best is manifestly superior to Scott, whom he

read in translations that could not reproduce " the kindly Scots " that his predecessor wrote so well. He did much exaggerate when he said that Sir Walter occupied half a volume, or a whole volume, in " a mortally wearisome " setting forth of his characters ; but he was as unfair to himself when he speaks as if his own conclusions were weak and tedious.

In old age Dumas had to fall back on the support of his son, the dramatist. " They call me extravagant," he said, " but I came to Paris as a lad with one *louis*, and here it is." He died on December 5, 1870, near Dieppe, quite outworn, and scarcely conscious, if at all conscious of the sorrows of his country. *C'est trop lourd*, time, and toil, and pleasure had become too heavy for the Porthos of literature.

If any reader has misgivings about Dumas' part in his own best novels, let him read his *Mémoires*. Nobody says that Dumas had collaborators in composing them. Take merely the scene when Dumas meets Charles Nodier at a performance of the *Vampire*, based on Polidori's expansion of Byron's opening scene of a tale of horror published with his *Mazeppa*. How full the scene is of humor, with irrepressible vivacity, of the unexpected, and of curious knowledge. Fulness of life, strength, gaiety, brightness, such is the work of Dumas. Compare his *Mousquetaires* with Mérimée's *L'Archer de Charles IX*. *L'Archer* is good, undeniably, but there is only one Alexandre Dumas, only one Scott ; and setting Thackeray with his *Esmond* and *Barry Lyndon* and *The Virginians* beside Scott and Dumas, we have on one throne three kings of Brentford in the realm of historical romance.

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THE THREE MUSKETEERS.

CHAPTER I.

THE THREE GIFTS OF M. D'ARTAGNAN THE ELDER.

ON the first Monday of the month of April, 1625, the small town of Meung, the birthplace of the author of the "Romance of the Rose," appeared to be in as complete a state of revolution as if the Huguenots had come to make a second siege of La Rochelle. Many of the townsmen, seeing the women flying along the chief street, and leaving the children squalling at their thresholds, hastened to don their armour, and, fortifying their somewhat doubtful courage with a musket or partisan, they proceeded toward the hostelry of the Jolly Miller, in front of which a noisy and accumulating crowd was buzzing with intense curiosity.

At that period alarms were frequent, and few days passed without some town or other registering in its archives an event of this description. There were the nobles, who made war on each other; there was the king, who made war on the cardinal; there was the Spaniard who made war on the king. Then besides these conflicts, secret or open, there were, moreover, robbers, beggars, Huguenots, wolves, and lackeys, who made war on the world. The townsmen always armed themselves against the robbers, the wolves, and the lackeys; fre-

quently against the nobles and the Huguenots; sometimes against the king; but never against the cardinal or the Spaniard. From this custom, therefore, it arose that on the aforesaid first Monday in the month of April 1625, the townspeople, hearing a noise, and seeing neither the yellow and red flag, nor the livery of the Duke of Richelieu, rushed toward the village inn, the Jolly Miller. Having reached it, every one could see and understand the cause of this alarm. A young man——

But let us trace his portrait with one stroke of the pen. Fancy to yourself Don Quixote at eighteen—Don Quixote in everyday attire, without his coat of mail or greaves—Don Quixote clothed in a woolen doublet whose original azure was changed to an indescribable shade, a tint between the dregs of wine and a celestial blue. The face lanky and tanned; the cheek-bones high, denoting acuteness; the muscles of the jaws prodigiously developed—an infallible mark by which the Gascon may be recognized, even without the cap, and our youth wore a cap, adorned with a flyaway feather; the eye full and intelligent; a Roman nose, but finely formed; the whole figure too bulky for a youth, yet too small for a full-grown man, but one whom an inexperienced eye would have taken for the son of a farmer on a journey, had it not been for the long sword, which hanging from a leathern belt, clanked against the heels of its owner whilst he was walking, and against the rough coat of his steed when he was mounted—for our youth had a steed, and this steed was at the same time so remarkable as to attract attention. It was a Béarnese galloway, of about twelve or fourteen years of age, tawny as an orange, without any hair on its tail, but abundant lumps upon its legs, and which, whilst carrying its head lower than its knees, making the application of a martingale useless, yet managed gallantly its eight leagues a day. Unfortunately, these useful qualities of the steed were so well concealed under its staring hide and eccentric gait, that at a time when every one knew something of horses, the apparition of the aforesaid

t Meung, which it had entered about a quarter of an hour before, by the gate of Beaugency, produced an unfavorable impression, which extended even to its rider. And this impression was the more painful to young D'Artagnan (for that was the name of the Don Quixote of this second Rozinante), that he could not conceal from himself the ridiculous plight in which he, albeit so good a horseman, was placed by such a steed. He had, therefore, sighed deeply when he accepted the gift from M. d'Artagnan, his father; he knew that such a beast was worth about twenty francs. It is true that the words which accompanied the present were priceless.

"My son," said the Gascon gentleman, in that pure Béarnese patois or dialect which Henry IV. could never entirely shake off, "My son, this horse was born in the paternal family about thirteen years ago, and has remained in it ever since, which alone ought to make you regard it with affection. Never sell it; let it die calmly and honorably of old age; and should you go through a campaign on its back, take as much care of it as you would of an old servant. At the court, if you should ever have the honor to go there—an honor, however, to which your long line of noble ancestors entitles you—support with dignity the name of gentleman, which has been honorably borne by your ancestors, for you and your descendants, for more than five hundred years. Never quietly submit to the slightest indignity, unless it happens to proceed from the cardinal or the king. It is by courage—mark this well—it is by courage alone that a gentleman makes his way nowadays. Whoever hesitates one moment, perhaps lets the chance escape him, which fortune, for that moment alone, has put within his reach. You are young, and ought to be brave, for two reasons: in the first place, because you are a Gascon; in the second, because you are my son. Doubt not that there will be opportunities, and look around you for adventures. You have been taught to handle the sword; you have muscles of iron, a wrist like steel; fight whenever you can, fight all the more because

duels are forbidden, and consequently it requires twic as much courage to challenge an opponent. I have bu fifteen crowns to give you, my son, besides the hors and the advice which you now hear. Your mother wi add to them the recipe for a certain salve, which sh procured from a Bohemian woman, and which has th miraculous power of curing every wound which does no touch the heart. Take advantage of such magnificen opportunities, and live long and happily. I have onl one word more to add, and it is an example which offer you; not my own, for I have never been at court I have only served in the religious wars as a volunteer I wish to speak to you of M. de Treville, who was formerl my neighbor, and who has had the honor of playing whilst a boy, with our king, Louis XIII., whom Go preserve. Sometimes their sports turned to battles, an in these battles the king had not always the best of it yet the cuffs he received from M. de Treville imbue him with a great deal of esteem and friendship for him Afterward, M. de Treville, during his first journey t Paris, fought five times with other persons; from th death of the late monarch to the majority of the young king, he has fought seven times, without reckoning campaigns and sieges; and since that day to the present perhaps a hundred times! And yet, in spite of edicts ordinances, and arrests, behold him now captain of th Life Guards; that is, chief of a legion of fire-eater upon whom the king mainly depends, and who ar feared by the cardinal, who, as every one knows, is no afraid of a trifle. Moreover, M. de Treville gains ter thousand crowns a year, and therefore is a man of con sequence. He began the world as you do. Go to hi with this letter, and let your conduct be regulated by him, and may you meet with the same success."

Hereupon M. d'Artagnan, the father, buckled his own sword round his son's waist, tenderly kissed him on each cheek, and gave him his blessing. Leaving the paterna chamber, the young man found his mother waiting with the famous recipe; and, from the advice he had just

received, it seemed very probable that he would require to use it pretty often. The farewell of his mother was longer and much more affectionate than that of his father; not but that M. d'Artagnan loved his son, who was his only child, but he was a man who would have considered it unworthy of himself to give way to any emotion; whilst Madame d'Artagnan was a woman, and, what is more, a mother. She wept abundantly; and, to the credit of M. d'Artagnan, the son, we may as well admit that, whatever efforts he made to remain firm, as became the future guardsman, nature gained the day, and he shed many tears, half of which he had great difficulty in concealing.

The same day our youth took his way, furnished with the three paternal gifts, which were, as we have said, the fifteen crowns, the steed, and the letter to M. de Treville. As may be well imagined, the advice was thrown in gratis. With such a *vade mecum*, D'Artagnan found himself, morally and physically, the counterpart of the hero of Cervantes, to whom we so happily compared him when our duty as historian obliged us to draw his portrait. Don Quixote took windmills for giants, and sheep for armies; D'Artagnan considered every smile an insult, and even a look a provocation. It followed that his fist was doubled from Tarbes to Meung; and, from one cause or another, his hand was on the pommel of his sword ten times a day. However, the fist did not descend upon anybody's jaw, nor did the sword once leave its scabbard. It was not that the unlucky yellow galloway did not excite many a smile on the countenances of those he met; but, as beside the said yellow galloway bobbed a sword of respectable length, and above the sword glistened an eye less proud than ferocious, the passengers repressed their laughter, or, if their mirth surpassed their prudence, they took care only to smile on the far side of their faces, like the ancient masks. D'Artagnan, therefore, remained dignified and uninterrupted in his susceptibility, even to this unlucky town of Meung. But

there, when he dismounted, at the door of the Jo
Miller, without any one, either landlord, waiter,
hostler, coming to hold the stirrup of his horse, D'Art
gnan perceived at the open window of a room on th
ground floor, a gentleman of handsome figure and di
tinguished air, although with a countenance slightl
lowering, conversing with two persons who appeared t
listen to him with deference. D'Artagnan imagine
according to his usual conceit, that they were talkin
about him, and accordingly listened. This time, hov
ever, he was only half wrong ; he was not the subject
conversation, but his horse. The gentleman appeare
to be enumerating to his hearers all his qualities ; an
since, as I have said, his hearers appeared to pay hi
great deference, they every moment gave way to burst
of laughter.

Now, since the slightest smile was sufficient to rous
the anger of our youth, one may well imagine wha
effect such unbridled mirth was likely to produce upo
him. Nevertheless, D'Artagnan wished first to e
amine the countenance of the impertinent fellow wh
thus laughed at him. He therefore fixed his stern loo
upon the stranger, and saw a man from forty to forty
five years of age, with black and piercing eyes, pa
complexion, strongly marked nose, and black mustach
carefully trimmed. He was clothed in a violet-colore
doublet and breeches, with points of the same color, wit
no other ornaments than the sleeves through which th
shirt passed. This doublet and these breeches, thoug
new, displayed divers wrinkles and creases, as if the
had been for some time packed up in a portmantea
D'Artagnan made these remarks with the rapidity of
practised observer, and doubtless with an instinctiv
feeling which told him that this unknown was to hav
a vast influence on his future life.

At the very moment that D'Artagnan fixed his ey
upon the gentleman with the violet doublet, that in
vidual made one of his wisest and most profound re
marks upon the Béarnese galloway. His two auditor

oared with laughter, and he himself, contrary to his sual custom, permitted a sort of sickly smile to wander ver his countenance. This time there was no room or doubt. D'Artagnan was really insulted. Being onvinced of this, he pulled his cap over his eyes, and rying to imitate the courtly airs which he had by chance een among some of the Gascon nobility in their pro- incial visits, he placed one hand on the guard of his word, and the other on his hip. Unfortunately, the earer he advanced, the more furious became his rage, o that instead of the high and dignified language which e had prepared in which to give expression to his vrath, he found nothing at the tip of his tongue but a ough personality, which he accompanied with a furious esture.

"Halloo, sir," he cried, "you, sir, who hide your- elf behind the shutter, yes, you, tell me what you are aughing at, and we will laugh together."

The gentleman slowly turned his eyes from the steed o his rider, as if it required some time to comprehend hat these strange words were addressed to himself; hen, when he could no longer doubt it, he slightly nit his brows, and after a pretty long pause, with an ccent of irony and insolence impossible to describe, e answered D'Artagnan, "I am not speaking to you, ir."

"But I am speaking to you, sir," cried the young nan, exasperated by this mixture of insolence and good manners, of politeness and disdain.

The unknown regarded him yet a moment with a light smile, and then leaving the window, slowly saunt- red out of the hotel, and stationed himself opposite the horse, at two paces from D'Artagnan. His serene yet arcastic countenance redoubled the mirth of his com- panions, who still remained at the window. D'Arta- nan, seeing him come out, drew his sword a foot out f its scabbard.

"This horse decidedly is, or rather has been, a jewel," ontinued the unknown, pursuing his remarks and ad-

dressing his auditors at the window, without appearin to notice the exasperation of D'Artagnan, who, neve theless, swelled and strutted between them; "it is a color," he continued, "well known in botany, but present very rare among horses."

"A man may laugh at a horse, who would not dare laugh at its master," cried the infuriated youth.

"I do not often laugh, sir," answered the unknow "as you may yourself discover by the character of m countenance; but yet I mean to keep the right of laug ing when I please."

"And I," roared D'Artagnan, "do not choose an one to laugh when I do *not* please."

"Really, sir!" continued the unknown, more calm than ever; "well, it is quite right;" and turning o his heel, he essayed to re-enter the hotel by the fro door, opposite which D'Artagnan, on arriving, ha observed a horse ready saddled.

But D'Artagnan was not the man to let any on thus escape who had the insolence to quiz him; h therefore drew his sword and pursued him, exclaimin "Turn, turn, sir quizzer, that I may not strike yo behind."

"Strike me!" exclaimed the other, quickly turnin round, and regarding the youth with as much astoni ishment as contempt, "go along with you, little boy you are crazy!" Then, in a low voice, as if he we speaking to himself, he added, "It is annoying; wha a prize for his majesty, who is everywhere seeking brav men to recruit his guards."

He had scarcely finished when D'Artagnan made suc a furious thrust at him, that, had he not jumped bac briskly, it is probable he would have given utteran to his last joke. Perceiving now, however, that th affair was beyond a joke, the unknown drew his swor saluted his adversary, and gravely put himself on h guard; but at the same moment his two auditor accompanied by the host, fell pell-mell upon D'Art gnan with broomsticks, pokers, and tongs. This cause

such a complete diversion that, whilst D'Artagnan himself turned to face this shower of blows, his opponent put up his sword with uninterrupted tranquillity, and, from an actor, became a spectator of the combat; a character which he supported with the same imperturbability, yet all the time muttering, "Plague upon these Gascons! Put him astride his orange-coloured horse and pack him off."

"Not before I have slain you, you coward!" cried D'Artagnan, all the time making the best resistance he could, and not yielding one step to his three opponents, who showered their blows upon him.

"Yet another gasconade!" murmured the gentleman; "upon my honor, these Gascons are incorrigible; keep up the racket, since he will have it; when he is tired, let him tell you."

But the stranger did not yet know with what a stubborn being he had to deal. D'Artagnan was not the man to sue for quarter. The contest, therefore, continued for some moments longer, until at last, completely worn out, D'Artagnan dropped his sword, which was broken in two by a blow from a stick, and just at the same instant another blow, which cut open his forehead, stretched him nearly senseless on the ground.

It was at this juncture that all the inhabitants of the town hastened to the scene of action. Fearing a disturbance, the host, assisted by his servants, carried the wounded man to the kitchen, where some attention was bestowed upon him. As for the stranger, he returned to the window, and viewed the crowd with evident marks of impatience.

"Well, how is that madman now?" said he, turning and addressing the host, who came to ascertain in what state he was.

"Is your excellency safe and well?" demanded the host.

"Yes, entirely so, my worthy host; but I wish to know what has become of this young man."

"He is better," replied the host; "but he was struck senseless."

"Indeed!" replied the gentleman.

"But before he quite lost his senses, he rallied all his strength to challenge and defy you," added the host.

"Why, this fellow is the very devil," said the gentleman.

"Oh, no, your excellency, oh, no," replied the host with a contemptuous grin; "he is not the devil, for while he was senseless we rummaged him, and in his bundle we found but one shirt, and only twelve crowns in his pocket, which, however, did not prevent his saying, just before he fainted, that had this happened in Paris, you should quickly have repented it, but as it has taken place here you will not have to repent it until some time hence."

"Therefore," coolly observed the stranger, "he doubtless is a prince of the blood in disguise."

"I give you this information, sir," said the host "that you may be on your guard."

"And did he not name any one in his anger?"

"Yes, he slapped his pocket and said, 'We shall see what M. de Treville will say to this insult offered to his *protégé*.'"

"M. de Treville?" said the unknown, becoming more attentive; "he slapped his pocket, and mentioned the name of M. de Treville? Let us see, my good host, whilst this young man was senseless, you did not fail to examine that pocket; what did it contain?"

"A letter addressed to M. de Treville, captain of the guards."

"Really?"

"It is as I have the honor to tell your excellency," said the host.

The latter, who had no great penetration, did not remark the effect which these words had upon the countenance of the stranger, who now left the window-sill, on which his elbow had rested, and frowned like a man disturbed in his mind.

"The devil!" he muttered between his teeth; "Treville could not have sent this Gascon; he is very young;

but a thrust of a sword is a thrust of a sword, whatever may be the age of him that gives it, and one distrusts a boy less than another; a slight obstacle is sufficient to thwart a project." And the stranger fell into a reverie which lasted some minutes. "Come, mine host," at length he said, "will you not rid me of this madman? I cannot conscientiously kill him, and yet," he added, with a menacing air, "he annoys me. Where is he?"

"In my wife's chamber, on the first story, where they are dressing his wounds."

"Are his clothes and his bag with him? Has he not taken off his doublet?"

"On the contrary, these are below in the kitchen," said the host; "but since this young madman annoys you——"

"Doubtless; he causes a disturbance in your hotel, which quiet people cannot bear. Go to your room, make out my bill, and give orders to my servants."

"What, sir, are you going already?"

"Yes. I ordered you to saddle my horse; have I not been obeyed?"

"Yes, and your excellency may see your horse standing under the grand entrance, quite ready for you."

"Very well; then do as I desire you."

"Heyday!" said the host to himself; "can he be afraid of this young boy?" But a commanding look from the stranger cut him short; he humbly bowed and left the room.

"Milady must not see this strange fellow," said the stranger; "she must soon pass, as she is already late. I had better mount my horse and go to meet her. If I could but learn the contents of that letter addressed to Treville." And thus muttering, the unknown descended to the kitchen.

In the meantime, the host, who did not doubt that this youth's presence was driving the stranger from his hotel, had gone to his wife's chamber, and found that D'Artagnan had recovered his senses. Then, whilst he made him comprehend that the police might arrest him

for having insulted a great lord (for, according to the host's idea, the stranger could be nothing less than a great lord), he persuaded him, in spite of his weakness, to continue his journey.

D'Artagnan, half-stunned, without doublet, and his head completely enveloped in cloths, arose, and, pushed out by the host, began to descend the stairs; but, on reaching the kitchen, the first object he saw was his opponent, who was quietly talking at the door of a heavy carriage, drawn by two large Norman horses. The person with whom he was conversing was a woman of about twenty or twenty-two years of age, whose head appeared through the window of the carriage, like a picture in a frame. We have already said how rapidly D'Artagnan caught the expression of a countenance: he saw, therefore, at a first glance, that the lady was young and beautiful. Now this beauty was the more striking to him, as it was completely different from that of the southern country which he inhabited. She was pale and fair, with long curls falling on her shoulders, large blue languishing eyes, rosy lips, and hands of alabaster. She was talking with the stranger with great vivacity.

"So, his eminence commands me——" said the lady.

"To return immediately to England, and apprise him, with all speed, whether the duke has left London," said the stranger.

"And as to my other instructions?" demanded the fair traveler.

"They are enclosed in this box, which you will not open until you are on the other side of the channel."

"Very well; and you? what are you going to do?"

"I return to Paris."

"Without chastising this insolent boy?" demanded the lady.

The unknown was about to reply, but the moment he opened his mouth, D'Artagnan, who had heard every word, rushed to the doorway. "It is that insolent boy," he cried, "who chastises others, and I hope that

this time he who deserves chastisement will not escape him."

"Will not escape him?" replied the unknown, frowning.

"No, in the presence of a woman you would not dare to fly, I presume."

"Consider," said the lady, seeing the gentleman place his hand to his sword, "consider that the slightest delay might ruin all."

"You are right," said the gentleman; "go your way, then, and I will go mine." Then saluting the lady with a bow, he threw himself on his horse, and the coachman whipped his horses. The lady and gentleman therefore went off at a gallop toward the opposite ends of the street.

"Halloo! your bill!" vociferated mine host, whose respect for the traveler was changed to the most profound contempt when he saw him departing without paying his bill.

"Pay him, rascal!" cried the traveler, as he galloped off, to his valet, who threw three or four pieces of silver at the feet of the host, and set off at full speed after his master.

"Oh, coward! wretch! false-hearted gentleman!" cried D'Artagnan, rushing after the valet. But he was still too feeble from his wounds to bear such an effort. Scarcely had he gone ten paces before his ears tingled, a giddiness seized him, a cloud passed before his eyes, and he fell down in the street, still crying, "Coward! coward! coward!"

"Verily he *is* a coward," murmured the host, who, now approaching D'Artagnan, endeavored to soothe him by his flattery, like the heron in the fable with her friend the snail.

"Yes, a sad coward," murmured D'Artagnan · "but she is beautiful."

"Who is she?" said the host.

"Milady!" murmured D'Artagnan and fainted away.

"Never mind," said the host; "although I have lost

two guests, at any rate, I have secured this one, who I am sure of keeping some days; at all events, I am pretty certain of his eleven crowns."

It must be borne in mind that eleven crowns was the exact sum which remained in D'Artagnan's purse; and the host had reckoned upon eleven days' illness, at a crown a day. On this point, however, he reckoned without his guest. The following day D'Artagnan got up, went down to the kitchen, and in addition to certain ingredients, the names of which have not descended to posterity, demanded some wine, oil, and rosemary, which, with his mother's recipe in his hand, he compounded into a salve with which he anointed his numerous wounds, renewing his plasters himself, and not allowing the interposition of any surgeon.

Thanks, no doubt, to the Bohemian salve, and perhaps also to the absence of the doctor, D'Artagnan found himself on foot in the evening, and almost cured by the next day. But at the moment he was paying for this wine, oil and rosemary, the sole expense he had incurred (for he had eaten absolutely nothing, whilst, on the contrary, according to the hostler's account, the yellow horse had consumed three times as many oats as one would have supposed possible from his size), D'Artagnan found nothing in his pocket but his little purse, with its eleven crowns. As for the letter to M. de Treville that had disappeared. The young man began by looking very patiently for this letter, turning out and rummaging his pockets twenty times, rummaging his bag, and opening and shutting his purse; but when he was quite convinced that the letter was not to be found, he gave full vent to another fit of rage in a manner which had well-nigh rendered necessary a second decoction of wine and spiced oil. For at the sight of this young scatter-brain raging, and threatening to destroy everything in his establishment, if the letter were not found, the host had already seized a spear, his wife had taken up a broom, and the waiter was flourishing a cudgel he had wielded the evening before.

"My letter of introduction!" cried D'Artagnan, "my letter of introduction! or by St. Denis, I will spit you all like so many ortolans."

One circumstance prevented the youth from accomplishing his threat, which was, that his sword, as we have related, had unfortunately been broken in two in the first struggle, a mischance he had entirely forgotten; consequently, when D'Artagnan drew it, he found himself armed only with the stump, about eight or ten inches long, which the host had carefully thrust into the scabbard. As for the rest of the blade, the cook had adroitly turned it into a skewer. And yet it is probable that this deception would not have stopped our fiery youth, had not the host reflected that the demand which his guest made was perfectly just.

"But after all," said he, lowering his spear, "where is this letter?"

"Yes, where is this letter?" roared D'Artagnan; "and let me tell you that this letter is for M. de Treville, and that it must be found, otherwise M. de Treville will take care to find it himself."

The threat completely frightened mine host. Next to the king and the cardinal, M. de Treville was the man whose name was most frequently in the mouths of the military, and indeed of the citizens. There was, certainly, Father Joseph; but his name was never mentioned except in an undertone, so great was the terror which his gray eminence (as the familiar of the cardinal was called) inspired; therefore, throwing away his spear, and ordering his wife to do the same with her broom-handle, and his waiters with their staves, he himself set the example by commencing a diligent search for the letter.

"Did this letter contain anything valuable?" inquired the host, after some moments of fruitless search.

"I believe so, indeed," cried the Gascon, who calculated on the letter to make his way at court; "it contained my fortune."

"Were they Spanish bonds?" demanded the host, much disturbed.

"Bonds on the private treasury of his majesty!" replied D'Artagnan, who, calculating on entering the king's service through this letter of introduction, though he might, without lying, make this somewhat rash reply.

"The devil!" exclaimed the host, altogether astounded.

"But it is of no consequence," continued D'Artagnan with Gascon gravity; "the money is nothing, the letter is all I want. I had rather have lost a thousand pistoles than that!" He might as well have said twenty thousand, but a certain youthful modesty restrained him. A sudden flash of light illumined the mind of the host, who was consigning himself to the devil for finding nothing.

"This letter is not lost!" he cried.

"Ah!" said D'Artagnan.

"No, it has been taken from you."

"Taken! and by whom?"

"By the stranger, yesterday; he went into the kitchen, where your doublet was lying; he was there entirely alone; and I will wager anything it was he who stole it from you."

"You really think so?" said D'Artagnan, but half convinced, for he knew better than anybody the strictly personal nature of the letter, and saw nothing in it to excite cupidity. The fact is, that none of the waiters or travelers who were there could have gained anything by the paper.

"You say, then," continued D'Artagnan, "that you suspect this impertinent stranger?"

"I tell you I am quite certain of it," said the host. "When I told him that your worship was the *protégé* of M. de Treville, and that you had a letter for that illustrious gentleman, he appeared much disturbed, demanded where the letter was, and immediately went into the kitchen, where your doublet was lying."

"He is the thief," said D'Artagnan; "I will complain to M. de Treville, and he will lay my complaint before the king."

And he majestically drew from his pocket two crowns,

which he handed to the host, who followed him, hat in hand, to the gate, where he remounted his yellow horse, which carried him without further accident to the gate of St. Antoine, at Paris. There its owner sold the animal for three crowns, which was a good price, considering that D'Artagnan had completely foundered him, in the latter half of the journey. The dealer to whom he sold the galloway for these nine francs, did not conceal from the young man that he gave this exorbitant sum merely on account of the comicality and originality of his color.

D'Artagnan accordingly entered Paris on foot, carrying his small bag under his arm, and proceeded until he found a lodging suitable to his slender resources. This chamber was a sort of garret situated in the Rue des Fossoyeurs, near the Luxembourg. Having paid the earnest penny, he took possession of his lodging, and passed the remainder of the day sewing on his doublet and breeches sundry tags and laces which his mother had secretly taken from a nearly new doublet of M. d'Artagnan, the father. He then repaired to the Quai de la Foraille, to procure a new blade for his sword; after which he returned to the Louvre, to learn from the first musketeer he met, where M. de Treville's hotel was situated. This he ascertained to be in the Rue du Vieux Colombier; that is, in the very neighborhood where he had hired his own chamber, a circumstance which he construed into a happy omen of the success of his expedition.

These matters disposed of, and satisfied with the manner in which he had behaved at Meung, with no remorse for the past, confident regarding the present, and full of hope for the future, he went to bed and slept the sleep of the brave. This sleep lasted till nine o'clock in the morning, at which hour he arose to repair to the hotel of the famed M. de Treville, who, in the estimation of D'Artagnan's father, was the third personage in the realm.

CHAPTER II.

THE ANTE-CHAMBER OF M. DE TREVILLE.

M. DE TROISVILLE, as his family was yet called in Gascony, or M. de Treville, as he called himself in Paris, had actually begun life like D'Artagnan; that is to say, without being worth a sou, but with that fund of audacity, wit and resolution, which makes the poorest Gascon gentleman often inherit more in virtue of tact and thrift than the richest gentleman of Périgord or Berri receives in reality His reckless bravery—cool and defiant, especially when blows were falling thick as hail—had raised him to the top of that difficult ladder called court favor, which he had mounted four steps at a time. He was the confidential friend of the king, who, as every one knows, greatly honored the memory of his father, Henry IV. The father of M. de Treville had served the latter so faithfully in his war against the League, that, instead of ready money (a commodity which, during his life, was very scarce with the Béarnese, who constantly paid his debts with what he never had occasion to borrow, that is to say, with his genius), instead of ready money, as we have said, he had authorized him, after the surrender of Paris, to take for his arms a golden lion, rampant on a field of gules, with the motto, "fidelis et fortis." It was a great deal of honor, but not much profit; and thus it happened, when the illustrious companion of Henry the Great died, the sole inheritance he left his son was his sword, with the arms and motto. Thanks, however, to his double legacy, and to the stainless name which accompanied it, M. de Treville was admitted into the household of the young prince, where he made such good use of his sword and was so true to his motto, that Louis XIII., one of the best swordsmen of his own kingdom, used to say, that if he had a friend who was going to fight, he would advise him to take for a second, first himself, and then

Treville, or even perhaps before himself. On this account, Louis had a real affection for Treville; a royal attachment, an egotistical affection, it must be allowed, but which, nevertheless, was real. In those unhappy days it was much the custom to surround one's self with men of Treville's stamp. Many could take for their device the epithet of "fortis," which formed the second part of the motto, but few men had any right to the epithet "fidelis," which formed the first part of it. Treville was one of the latter class; yet obedient as the mastiff, with a blind courage, and a ready hand, to whom the eye had been given only to see whether the king was dissatisfied with any one, and the hand but to strike the offending person—a Besme, a Maurevers, a Poltrot de Méré, a Vitry; in short, Treville only wanted an opportunity; but he watched for it, and was resolved to seize it by the hair of its head if ever it came within his grasp. Louis XIII. therefore appointed Treville captain of the musketeers, who, by their devotion, or rather fanaticism, became what his ordinary troops were to Henry IV. and his Scottish guard to Louis XI. In this respect the cardinal was not behind the king; for when he saw the formidable picked guard with which Louis surrounded himself, this second, or rather this foremost king of France, wished also to have his own guard; he, therefore, as well as the king, had his guard; and these two rival powers selected for their service, from all the provinces of France, and even all foreign countries, men famous for their skill as swordsmen. And Richelieu and the king, over their game of draughts in the evening, often disputed concerning the merits of their respective followers. Each boasted of the firmness and courage of his own; and whilst openly inveighing against duels and quarrels, they secretly excited their respective partisans to fight, and experienced intense chagrin, or immoderate delight, at their respective victories or defeats. Thus, at least, says the memoir of one who had taken a part in some of these defeats and many of these victories.

Treville had taken advantage of this weakness of his master's with such skill as to obtain the long and constant favour of a king who has not the reputation of having been constant in his friendships. He paraded his musketeers before the Cardinal Armand Duplessis with an air of irony which made the gray mustache of his eminence curl with anger. Treville also thoroughly understood the war of that period, when, if you did not live at the expense of the enemy, you were obliged to prey upon your countrymen. His soldiers formed a legion of very devils, under no discipline but his own. Swaggering bullies, given to wine, the king's musketeers, or rather M. de Treville's, spread themselves through the taverns, in the public walks, and in the theatres, talking loud, curling their mustaches, jingling their swords, shouldering the guards of the cardinal when they met them, indulging, in the open street, in a thousand jokes; sometimes killed, but sure, in death, of being lamented and avenged; sometimes killing, but quite certain then not to languish in prison, since M. de Treville was always at hand to procure their pardon. Therefore, M. de Treville was lauded in every tone, sung of in every key, by these men, who adored him; yet ban-dogs as they were, they trembled before him as scholars before their master, obedient to a word, and ready to be killed to wipe away any reproach.

M. de Treville had used this powerful lever, first, for the king and his friends, and next for himself and his own friends. [Fifteen lines omitted, praising M. de T. as a gentleman and a soldier. See pp. 25, 26, Fr.] The captain of the musketeers was therefore admired, feared and loved, which state constitutes the apogee of human happiness.

Louis XIV. absorbed all the lesser stars of his court by his vast brilliancy; but his father, *Sol pluribus impar*, left to each of his favorites his own personal splendor—his individual valor to each of his courtiers. Besides the king's levee, and that of the cardinal, there were then at Paris at least two hundred smaller ones of some note;

and amongst the two hundred lesser levees, that of M. de Treville was one of those most frequented. From six o'clock in the morning during summer, and eight in the winter, the court-yard of his mansion in the Rue du Vieux Colombier resembled a camp. From fifty to sixty musketeers, who appeared to relieve each other, so as to present a number always imposing, were stalking about incessantly, armed to the teeth, and ready for anything. From one end to the other of one of those long staircases, on whose extent our modern civilization would build an entire house, ascended and descended those petitioners who sought favors; with provincial gentlemen, eager to be enrolled, and lackeys, liveried in every color of the rainbow, who came to deliver messages from their masters to M. de Treville. In the ante-chamber, on long circular benches, reclined the *élite*, that is, such of them as had assembled; a continual buzzing prevailed from morning to night; while M. de Treville, in his cabinet adjoining the ante-chamber, received visits, listened to complaints, gave his orders and, like the king in his balcony at the Louvre, had only to place himself at his windows to review his little army and their accoutrements.

On the day when D'Artagnan presented himself, the assembly was very imposing, especially to a provincial just arrived in Paris. It is true this provincial was a Gascon, and at this period more especially, D'Artagnan's countrymen had the reputation of not being easily intimidated; in fact, as soon as any one had passed the threshold of the massive door studded with great iron nails, he found himself in the midst of a troop of swordsmen, who were cruising about the court, talking, quarreling, and jesting with each other. To clear a path through these wandering comets, it was necessary to be an officer, a man of rank, or a pretty woman. It was, therefore, in the midst of this crowd and disorder that our youth, holding his long rapier against his slender legs, and the rim of his beaver in his hand, advanced with palpitating heart, yet with that sort of half smile of rustic embarrassment which wishes to put the best

face upon an awkward matter. When he had passed one group, he breathed more freely, but he perceived that they turned to look at him, and D'Artagnan, who to that day had invariably entertained a pretty good opinion of himself, for the first time in his life thought himself ridiculous. When he had reached the staircase it was still worse: on the first step were four musketeers, who amused themselves in the following manner, whilst ten or a dozen of their companions waited on the landing-place till it was their turn to have a share in the games. One of them, on a higher step, with a naked sword in his hand, prevented, or endeavored to prevent the other three from mounting the stairs, whilst these three skirmished with him very actively with their swords. D'Artagnan at first took these swords for foils, and thought they were buttoned; but he soon perceived, by certain scratches, that each weapon was as sharp as possible, and at every wound, not only the spectators, but the actors themselves, laughed heartily. The one who held the higher step at that time kept his opponents at bay in a dexterous manner. A circle was formed around them, the condition of the game being that at every hit, he who was struck should relinquish the pastime and surrender his turn of reception by M. de Treville to the one who had touched him. In five minutes three were slashed—one on the hands, one on the chin, and another on the ear, by this defender of the staircase, who was himself untouched—a proof of his skill, which, according to the rules of the game, entitled him to three turns of favor. This sport surprised our young traveler, although he did not wish it to appear that he was astonished. He had seen in his own province (that province where, moreover, the fiery passions are so promptly roused) a good many provocatives to duels, and yet the gasconade of these four players appeared much stronger than any he had heard of even in Gascony. He fancied he was transported into that famous country of giants Gulliver penetrated, and where he was so greatly frightened. And yet he had not reached the end; the landing-

place and ante-chamber still remained. On the landing-place they did not fight, but recounted tales of the fair sex; and in the ante-chamber, tales of the court. In the ante-chamber, D'Artagnan shuddered; on the landing-place, he blushed. But if his good manners were shocked on the landing-place, his respect for the cardinal was scandalized in the ante-chamber: there, to his great astonishment, he heard the policy which made all Europe tremble openly criticised, as well as the private life of the cardinal, which so many powerful men had been punished for attempting to scrutinize. That great man, whom D'Artagnan's father had so deeply revered, M. de Treville's musketeers made their butt, deriding his bandy legs and crooked back; some sang comic snatches on Madame d'Aiguillon, his mistress, and Madame de Combalet, his niece, whilst others planned adventures against the pages and guards of the cardinal duke himself. All these things appeared to D'Artagnan monstrous impossibilities. Nevertheless, when the name of the king accidentally slipped out in the midst of these jokes on the cardinal, a sort of momentary gag stopped all their jeering mouths; they looked around with hesitation, and seemed to doubt the thickness of the wall of M. de Treville's cabinet. But some allusion soon brought back the conversation to the cardinal, and then the bursts of laughter were renewed, and none of his actions were palliated. "Verily," thought D'Artagnan with terror, "these gentry will soon be put into the Bastile, or hanged. Doubtless I shall accompany them, for, having heard all they have said, I shall, without doubt, be taken for an accomplice. What would my father say—he who enjoined me so strongly to respect the cardinal—if he knew that I was in the company of such reprobates?"

Of course D'Artagnan dared not join in the conversation; he only kept his eyes and ears wide open, and every sense on the alert, that he might lose nothing; and in spite of his confidence in the paternal advice, he found himself drawn by his tastes and instinct, rather

to praise than blame the incredible things he heard around him. Nevertheless, as he was absolutely a stranger to the crowd of M. de Treville's courtiers, and it was the first time he had been seen there, some one came to inquire what he wanted. At this question he humbly gave his name, relying on his being a countryman, and requested the servant to solicit a moment's audience of M. de Treville—a request which the inquirer, in the tone of a protector, promised to make at the proper time.

D'Artagnan, rallying a little from his first surprise, had now time to study the dress and expression of those around him. In the midst of the most animated group was a musketeer of great height, of a haughty countenance, and so fantastical a costume as to attract general attention. He did not wear his uniform cloak, but a coat of celestial blue, faded and worn, but trimmed with embroidery, which glittered like goldfish in a sunlit stream; a long mantle of crimson velvet hung gracefully from his shoulders, discovering the front alone of his splendid belt, from which depended his enormous rapier. This musketeer, who was but just off guard, complained of having caught cold, and coughed occasionally with affectation. Therefore, as he averred, he had put on his cloak; and whilst he was talking loudly, and proudly curling his mustache, every one much admired the embroidered belt, and D'Artagnan more than any one else.

"What would you have?" said the musketeer. "It is the fashion; I know very well that it is foolish, but it is the fashion; besides, one must spend one's hereditary property on something or other."

"Ah, Porthos!" cried one of the bystanders, "do not try to make us believe that this lace comes from the paternal generosity; it was given you by the veiled lady with whom I met you last Sunday, near the gate of St. Honoré."

"No, upon my honor, and by the faith of a gentleman, I bought it with my own money," said he whom they called Porthos.

"Yes, as I bought this new purse with what my mistress gave me," cried another musketeer.

"It is true," said Porthos, "and the proof is that I paid twelve pistoles for it."

The wonder and admiration were redoubled, though the doubt still existed.

"Is it not so, Aramis?" inquired Porthos, turning to another musketeer.

The person thus appealed to formed a perfect contrast to the one who questioned him, and who designated him by the name of Aramis. He was a young man not more than twenty-two or twenty-three years of age, with a soft and ingenuous countenance, a mild and sparkling eye, and cheeks as rosy as an autumn peach; his slender mustache marked a straight line upon his upper lip; his hands appeared to avoid hanging down, for fear of making their veins swell, and he was continually pinching the tips of his ears to make them preserve a delicate and transparent carnation hue. Habitually he talked little and slowly, often bowed, laughed quietly, merely showing his teeth, which were good, and of which, as of the rest of his person, he appeared to take the greatest care. He replied to his friend's question by an affirmative inclination of the head, and this affirmation appeared to settle all doubt concerning the embroidery. The guardsmen continued to admire it, but said no more about it; and by a sudden change of thought the conversation at once passed to another subject.

"Have you heard what Chalais's man says?" inquired another musketeer, not addressing any one in particular.

"And what does he say?" demanded Porthos, in a self-sufficient tone.

"He says that he found Rochefort, the tool of the cardinal, at Brussels, disguised as a Capuchin friar; and that this confounded Rochefort, thanks to his disguise, had deceived M. de Laignes, simpleton that he is."

"He is a fool," said Porthos; "but is it a fact?"

"I heard it from Aramis," answered the guardsman.

"Really!"

"Ah, you know it well enough, Porthos," said Aramis. "I told it you myself yesterday evening; do not let us talk any more about it."

"Not say any more about it! that's your view of the matter," said Porthos; "not say any more about it! Egad, you would make short work of it. What! the cardinal sets a spy upon a gentleman, robs him of his correspondence through a traitor, a robber, a hang-dog; cuts Chalais's throat through this spy, and by means of this correspondence, under the flimsy pretext that he desired to kill the king, and marry Monsieur to the queen. No one knew one word of this enigma; you told us of it yesterday evening, to the great astonishment of every one; and whilst we were still all amazed at the news, you come to-day, and say to us, 'Let us talk no more about it.'"

"Well, then, since it better suits your humor, let us talk about it," calmly replied Aramis.

"Were I poor Chalais's squire," cried Porthos, "I would make short work of it with this Rochefort."

"And the red duke would make short work with you," replied Aramis.

"Ah, the red duke! Bravo, bravo, the red duke!" exclaimed Porthos, with an approving nod, and clapping his hands; "the red duke is charming. Rest assured, my dear fellow, that I will publish the title. What a genius has our Aramis! what a pity that you could not follow your vocation, my dear fellow; what a fine priest you would have made."

"Oh, it won't be for long," replied Aramis; "one day or other I shall be one; for you well know, Porthos, that I continue to study theology with that intention."

"He will actually do as he says," replied Porthos; "he will do it sooner or later."

"Very soon," said Aramis.

"He only waits for one thing to decide what he will do, and to don the cassock, which hangs behind his uniform" remarked another musketeer.

"And what is it he is waiting for?" inquired another.

"He is waiting till the queen has given an heir to the crown of France."

"Let us not jest on this subject, gentlemen," said Porthos; "thank God, the queen is of an age to give it one."

"It is said that the Duke of Buckingham is in France," observed Aramis, with a satirical air, which gave to his remark, simple as was its appearance, a sufficiently scandalous meaning.

"Aramis, my friend, this time you are wrong," rejoined Porthos, "your wit always leads you too far. It would be the worse for you if M. de Treville heard you talking in this manner."

"Do not lecture me, Porthos!" cried Aramis, in whose usually soft eye something like the lightning's flash now appeared.

"My dear fellow, be either soldier or priest; be one or the other; but not first one and then the other," exclaimed Porthos. "You may remember that Athos told you the other day that you eat at every rack. But let us not dispute, I beseech you; it is useless. You know what is settled between you and me and Athos; you go to Madame de Bois Tracy, the cousin of Madame de Chevreuse, in whose good graces you are thought to stand highly. Nay, my dear fellow, confess not your good fortune, no one demands your secret; every one knows your discretion; but since you possess this virtue yourself, surely you will not grudge some portion of it to the queen. Occupy yourself as you please about the king and the cardinal, but the queen is sacred; and if you speak of her at all, let it be respectfully."

"Porthos, you are as presumptuous as Narcissus!" said Aramis; "you know that I detest moralizing, except from Athos; as to you, my dear fellow, you have too dazzling a belt to be an authority on that subject. I will be an abbé if it suits me; in the meantime I am a musketeer, in which character I say what

I choose, and at this moment I choose to tell you that you are tedious."

"Aramis!"

"Porthos!"

"Oh! gentlemen! gentlemen!" exclaimed those around them.

"M. de Treville awaits M. d'Artagnan," interrupted the lackey, opening the door of the cabinet.

At this declaration, during which the door remained open, every one was silent; and in the midst of this general silence, the young Gascon, passing through part of the ante-chamber, entered the cabinet of the captain of the musketeers, felicitating himself upon escaping the conclusion of this singular quarrel.

CHAPTER III.

THE AUDIENCE.

M. DE TREVILLE was at this moment in a very bad humor; nevertheless, as the young man bowed to the ground, he politely saluted him, and smiled on receiving his compliments, which recalled by their accent at once his youth and his country—a double recollection that makes a man smile at every period of his life. But going toward the ante-chamber, and making a sign with his hand to D'Artagnan, as if requesting permission to finish his business with others before he began with him, he called three times, raising his voice each time so as to run through the intermediate scale between the tone of command and that of anger,—"Athos! Porthos! Aramis!" The two musketeers, whose acquaintance we have already made, and who answered to the two last of these names, immediately quitted the group of which they formed a portion, and advanced toward the cabinet, the door of which was closed as soon as they had passed the threshold. Their countenances, although

not quite calm, were at the same time full of dignity and submission, and their apparent indifference excited the admiration of D'Artagnan, who saw in these men a species of demi-gods, and in their chief an Olympian Jupiter, armed with all his thunders.

When the two musketeers had entered, and the door was closed behind them; when the murmuring buzz of the ante-chamber, which the summons just given for a moment silenced, had recommenced; when, lastly, M. de Treville had paced the whole length of his cabinet three or four times in silence, but with a frowning brow, and passed each time before Porthos and Aramis, stiff and mute as on parade, he suddenly stopped directly in front of them, and measuring them from top to toe with an angry look, exclaimed—"Do you know what the king said to me, and that not later than last evening? Do you know, gentlemen?"

"No," answered the two musketeers, after a moment's silence; "no, sir, we do not know." "But we hope you will do us the honour of informing us," added Aramis in his most polished tone, and with the most graceful bow.

"He told me that, for the future, he should recruit his musketeers from the ranks of the cardinal."

"From the ranks of the cardinal! And why?" demanded Porthos.

"Because he saw very well that his miserable dregs required to be enlivened by some good and generous wine!"

The two musketeers blushed to the very eyes. D'Artagnan wished himself a hundred feet underground.

"Yes, yes," continued M. de Treville, becoming more warm; "yes, his majesty was right; for, upon my honor, the musketeers cut but a very sorry figure at court. Yesterday, whilst playing with the king, the cardinal recounted with an air of condolence which much annoyed me, that on the previous day these cursed musketeers, these devils incarnate—and he dwelt on these words with an ironical accent, which annoyed me the more; these cutters and slashers—looking at me

with the eyes of a lion—had loitered beyond the regulation hour in a tavern in the Rue Ferou, and that a picket of his guards had been obliged to arrest the disturbers. 'Od's life! you ought to know something about this. Arrest the musketeers! You were amongst them—you, sirs! do not deny it; you were recognized, and the cardinal named you. But it is my own fault; yes, my fault; for I choose my own men. Look ye, Aramis! why did you ask me for a uniform coat, when a cassock suited you so well? Hark ye, Porthos! have you got such a splendid belt only to hang it to a blade of lath? And Athos—I do not see Athos; where is he?"

"Sir," answered Aramis, in a melancholy tone, "he is ill, very ill."

"Ill! very ill, say you? and of what disorder?"

"We fear it will prove the small-pox," answered Porthos, anxious to put in a word; "and this would be very distressing, since it would certainly spoil his appearance."

"The small-pox! this is a nice story you are telling me, Porthos! Ill of small-pox at his age! No, no; but doubtless he is wounded, perhaps killed. Ah! if I were certain! By St. Denis, gentlemen, I do not understand why you haunt such vile places, why you quarrel in the streets, and play with the sword on the king's highway: and I do not wish you to be a laughing-stock for the cardinal's guards, who are brave men, quiet and skillful, who never lay themselves open to arrest, and who, moreover, would not allow themselves to be arrested. I am sure they would rather die than yield one step to save themselves! It is you who fly! who scamper away! A fine thing for the royal musketeers, indeed!"

Porthos and Aramis trembled with rage. They could have strangled M. de Treville, had they not perceived that his great affection for them was the foundation of all he said. As it was, they stamped on the carpet, bit their lips till the blood ran, and grasped the hilts of their swords in silent fury.

M. de Treville's summons for Athos, Porthos, and Aramis had, as we have said, been heard outside the room; and those who remained in the ante-chamber had concluded from the sound of his voice that he was in a towering rage. Ten curious heads, therefore, rested against the tapestry, and grew pale with anger, for their ears, glued to the door, lost not one word of what was said, whilst they rapidly repeated the taunting language of their captain to all who were in the ante-chamber. In an instant the whole mansion, from the door of the cabinet to the outer gate, was in a state of commotion.

"So the musketeers of the king allow themselves to be arrested by the guards of the cardinal!" continued M. de Treville, not less excited within than were his soldiers without, but jerking out his words, and plunging them, as one may say, one by one, like the thrusts of a dagger, into the bosoms of his auditors. "So, six of his excellency's guards arrest six of his majesty's musketeers! 'Fore God! I have taken my resolve! I will go hence to the Louvre, where I shall tender to the king my resignation as captain of the musketeers, and demand a lieutenancy in the cardinal's guards; and if I fail in this, by Heaven, I will turn abbé!"

At these words the murmurs without broke out into a regular explosion; nothing but oaths and curses were everywhere heard. "Morbleu!" "Sangdieu!" and "Death to the devils!" resounded through the hotel. D'Artagnan hastily glanced around the cabinet in search of some tapestry behind which he might hide himself, and failing in this, felt an almost uncontrollable desire to get under the table.

"Well, captain," said Porthos, almost beside himself, "the truth is, we were six against six, but were treacherously set upon, and before we had time to draw our swords, two of our party fell dead, and Athos was so grievously wounded as to be scarcely in better plight. You know him well, captain; twice he endeavored to rise, and twice he fell back; and yet we did not yield. No, we were dragged away by force, but escaped on the

road. As for Athos, we believed him dead, so we left him on the field of battle, not thinking he was worth carrying away. That is the truth. Zounds! captain, one cannot gain every battle; even the great Pompey lost Pharsalia; and Francis, who, I have heard, was as brave as most men, lost the battle of Pavia."

"And I can assure you that I killed one fellow with his own sword," said Aramis, "for mine was broken at the first encounter."

"I did not know these circumstances," said M. de Treville, in a somewhat milder tone; "from what I now learn, the cardinal must have exaggerated."

"But I beseech you, sir," said Aramis, who, seeing his captain more calm, ventured to hazard a request, "I beseech you, sir, do not say that Athos is wounded! he would be in despair if it came to the king's ears; and as the wound is very severe, having, after passing through the shoulder, penetrated the chest, it is not impossible——"

At this moment the door opened, and a noble and beautiful head, but with a countenance frightfully pale, appeared.

"Athos!" exclaimed both of the guardsmen.

"Athos!" repeated M. de Treville himself.

"You inquired for me," said Athos to M. de Treville, in a perfectly calm but feeble voice; "my comrades informed me that you commanded my presence and I hastened to obey you. Here I am, sir; what do you require me for?" And with these words the musketeer with a faultless air, and girded as usual, entered the cabinet with a firm step.

M. de Treville, touched to the heart by this proof of courage, rushed toward him. "I was just going to tell these gentlemen," added he, "that I forbid my musketeers to expose their lives unnecessarily; for brave men are dear to the king, and his majesty knows that his musketeers are the bravest on the earth. Your hand, Athos." And without waiting till he responded to this proof of affection, M. de Treville seized his hand, and

pressed it with much warmth, and without observing that Athos, notwithstanding his command over himself, uttered a cry of pain, and became even more pale than before, which seemed impossible.

In spite of the secrecy which had been observed respecting it, the severe wound which Athos had received was well known to his comrades, and his unlooked-for arrival had produced a great sensation amongst them. The door of the cabinet had, since his entrance, remained partly open; and, as two or three heads were, in the warmth of general curiosity, thrust through the opening of the tapestry, a simultaneous burst of applause followed the last words of their captain. M. de Treville would, doubtless, have sternly and instantly checked this infraction of the laws of propriety, but at the moment he suddenly felt the hand of Athos grasp his own, and, on looking at him, perceived that he was fainting; he had rallied all his powers to bear up against his pain during the interview; but he could now no longer sustain it, and fell senseless upon the carpet.

"A surgeon!" cried M. de Treville; "mine—the king's will be better—a surgeon, or my brave Athos will die!"

At these exclamations of M. de Treville every one rushed into the cabinet, and each pressed around the wounded man. But this eagerness would have been useless had not the surgeon been found in the hotel. Forcing his way through the spectators, he approached Athos, who was still insensible; and, as the pressure of the crowd occasioned him much inconvenience, he directed that the guardsman should be immediately conveyed into an adjoining apartment. M. de Treville opened a door, and pointed out the way to Porthos and Aramis, who bore off their comrade in their arms.

The cabinet of M. de Treville, a place usually deemed sacred, became for the moment an adjunct to the antechamber, where every one discoursed, talked loud, swore, and consigned the cardinal and all his guards to the infernal regions. In a few moments Porthos and Aramis

re-entered, having left M. de Treville and the surgeon with the wounded man; at length M. de Treville himself returned, and announced that Athos had recovered his senses; whilst the surgeon declared that there was nothing in his situation to alarm his friends, his weakness being occasioned entirely by the loss of blood.

Upon a signal from M. de Treville, every one now retired except D'Artagnan, who did not abandon his audience, but, with true Gascon tenacity, remained in the same place. When all the intruders had left the room, and the door was again closed, M. de Treville turned round and found himself alone with the young man. The event that had just taken place had in some measure disarranged the previous train of his ideas; and he therefore now inquired what this persevering pleader wanted. D'Artagnan repeated his name; and M. de Treville recalling the past and the present, instantly became aware of his situation.

"Pardon," said he, smiling, "pardon, my dear countryman, but I had entirely forgotten you. What do you want? A captain is not merely the father of a family, but burdened with a heavier responsibility than an ordinary parent; for soldiers are great children; but it is my duty to see that the orders of the king, and more especially those of the cardinal, are carefully executed."

D'Artagnan could not repress a smile; and this smile satisfied M. de Treville that he was not dealing with a fool. Therefore he came at once to the point, and at the same time changed the conversation.

"I greatly esteemed your father," said he; "what can I do for the son? Tell me quickly, for my time is not my own."

"Sir," said D'Artagnan, "in quitting Tarbes, and coming here, I wish to ask from you, as a memorial of the friendship which you have not forgotten, the uniform of a musketeer; but from what I have seen during these last two hours, I more fully comprehend the extreme importance of the favor, and tremble lest I may not be deemed worthy of it."

"It is indeed a great favor, young man," said M. de Treville; "but it cannot be so far above you as you believe, or, at least, seem to believe. However, a decision of his majesty provides for these cases; and I regret to inform you that no one is received among the musketeers who has not passed the ordeal of a campaign, performed some brilliant action, or served for two years in some less favored regiment than our own."

D'Artagnan bowed without replying, but at the same time feeling more eager to don the uniform of the musketeers, since that object could only be obtained with great difficulty.

"But," continued M. de Treville, fixing his piercing look upon his countryman, as if he wished to penetrate the inmost recesses of his heart, "for the sake of my ancient friend, your father, I wish to do something for you. Young man, we volunteers of Béarn are not in general overburdened with wealth, and I fear that matters are not much improved in this respect since I left the province. You cannot, therefore, have much remaining of the money you brought with you."

D'Artagnan drew himself up with a proud air, which seemed to say that he sought not alms from any one.

"It is well, young man, it is very well; I understand your feelings. I came to Paris myself with only four crowns in my pocket, and I would have fought any one who had dared to dispute my ability to purchase the Louvre."

D'Artagnan held himself still more proudly. Thanks to the sale of his horse, he began the world with four crowns more than M. de Treville.

"I should say, therefore, that however large may be the sum you really possess, you ought to preserve whatever you have. In the meantime you must complete yourself in all those accomplishments which become a gentleman, and I will this day write a letter to the director of the Royal Academy, who will receive you tomorrow without any pecuniary recompense. Do not refuse this trifling favor. Gentlemen of the highest

rank and wealth often solicit the same gift, without being able to obtain it. You will there learn to ride, to fence, and to dance; you will form good connections; and from time to time you will personally apprise me of your progress, and let me know if I can do anything for you."

D'Artagnan, ignorant as he was of the manners of the court, felt the coldness of this reception.

"Alas, sir," said he, "I now deeply feel the want of the letter of introduction which my father gave me."

"I am, in truth, somewhat surprised," replied M. de Treville, "that you should have undertaken so long a journey without that provision, so essential to every Béarnese."

"I had one, sir, in all proper form," cried D'Artagnan, "but was perfidiously robbed of it;" and with a degree of warmth and an air of truth which charmed M. de Treville, he recounted his adventures at Meung, accurately describing his unknown adversary.

"It was very strange," said M. de Treville, musingly. "You spoke of me openly, did you?"

"Yes, sir, I certainly committed that imprudence; but such a name as yours served me as a shield on my journey; therefore you must not judge me too severely if I sometimes protected myself with it."

Flattery was as much in vogue at that time as in the present age, and M. de Treville loved incense as well as king or cardinal. He could not help smiling, therefore, with evident satisfaction; but this smile soon passed away, and returning to the adventure at Meung, he said:

"Tell me, had not this gentleman a slight scar on his cheek?"

"Yes, as if produced by the grazing of a ball."

"Was he not a man of commanding air?"

"Yes."

"Of a tall figure?"

"Yes."

"Pale, but brown?"

"Yes, yes, that is he; but do you know this man, sir?

Ah! if I ever meet him—and I will find him, I swear to you, even were he in hell——"

"He was waiting for a woman?" continued M. de Treville.

"Yes, and he departed after he had conversed a moment with the woman he awaited."

"Do you not know the subject of their conversation?"

"He gave her a box, which he said contained her instructions, and charged her not to open it until she arrived in London."

"Was she an Englishwoman?"

"He called her 'Milady.'"

"It is he!" murmured Treville; "it is he! I thought he was at Brussels."

"Oh, sir," exclaimed D'Artagnan, "if you know this man, tell me where he is to be found and I will hold you absolved even of your promise to admit me amongst the musketeers, for before and above everything else, I long to avenge myself."

"Beware how you proceed in this matter, young man," said M. de Treville. "Instead of seeking your revenge, should you perceive this man walking on one side of the street, proceed yourself on the opposite side; precipitate not yourself against such a rock, upon which you will assuredly be shattered like glass."

"That fear will not deter me, should I ever meet him," said D'Artagnan.

"In the meantime, do not seek him," replied Treville. "I have one piece of advice to give you——"

But all at once M. de Treville paused as if struck by a sudden suspicion: the deadly hatred which the young traveller so openly avowed for this man, who had deprived him of his father's letter—which was itself a very improbable circumstance—might not this apparent enmity conceal some perfidy? Was not this young man sent by his eminence? Did not he come to lay a trap for him? Was not this pretended D'Artagnan an emissary of the cardinal, whom he sought to introduce into his house, and whom he wished to place near him

to worm himself into his confidence, and afterward to destroy him, as had been done a thousand times? He looked more earnestly at D'Artagnan than at first, and was but slightly reassured by the appearance of that countenance, beaming with natural talent and affected humility. "I know very well that he is a Gascon," thought he; "but he is just as likely to be one for the cardinal as for me. Yet I will try him further."

"Young man," said he, slowly, "as the son of my old friend—for I consider your story of the lost letter true—I wish, in order to compensate for the coolness which you perceived on my first reception, to reveal to you a secret of our politics. The king and the cardinal are the best of friends; their apparent disputes are merely to deceive simple folks; and I do not wish that my countryman, a handsome cavalier, a brave youth, formed to rise in the world, should be the dupe of all these pretenses, and, like a simpleton, rush headlong into the snare which has proved the destruction of so many others. Rest assured that I am entirely devoted to these two all-powerful masters, and that all my serious proceedings can never have any other object in view than the service of the king, and of the cardinal, who is one of the most illustrious geniuses that France has ever produced. Now, young man, regulate your conduct by this; and should you, through your family or connections, or from any feeling of your own, bear the slightest hostility toward the cardinal, such as you may have seen burst forth occasionally amongst our gentlemen, take your leave, and quit me. I can assist you in a thousand ways, without attaching you to my own person. At all events, I hope my frankness will make you my friend, for you are the first young man to whom I have ever spoken in this manner."

Treville ceased speaking, but he thought to himself, "If the cardinal has really sent me this fox, he would not surely fail—he who knows how much I loathe him—to tell his spy that the best mode of paying court to me, was to say everything bad of himself. Therefore in

spite of my protestations, the cunning fellow will doubtless say that he holds his eminence in detestation."

The result, however, was far different from M. de Treville's anticipations. With the utmost simplicity D'Artagnan replied: "Sir, I am come to Paris with sentiments and intentions exactly similar to those you have just expressed. My father charged me to obey no one but the king, the cardinal, and yourself, whom he considers the three greatest men in France." D'Artagnan, it will be perceived, added M. de Treville to the two others, but he considered that this addition would do no harm. "Hence," he continued, "I have the greatest veneration for the cardinal, and the most profound respect for his actions. It is, therefore, so much the better for me, since you will do me the honor to esteem this similarity of opinion; but if, on the contrary, as may be very natural, you entertain any feelings of distrust respecting me, so much the worse, as I shall then feel that I am ruined by speaking the truth. I hope, however, you will at least favor me with your esteem, which I value more than anything else."

M. de Treville was astonished. So much penetration, and yet so much candor, excited his admiration, although they failed to wholly remove his doubts. The more superior this youth was to other young men, the more formidable would he be if employed as a spy. Nevertheless, he grasped D'Artagnan's hand and said to him, "You are an honest fellow; but at present I can only do for you what I have promised. In the meantime, my house shall always be open to you; so that, having access to me at all times, and being ready to take advantage of every opportunity, you will probably hereafter obtain what you desire."

"That is to say," replied D'Artagnan, "that you will wait till I have become worthy of it. Very well," he added with Gascon familiarity, "rest assured that you will not have to wait long;" and he bowed to retire, as if from henceforth he must trust to himself only.

"But wait a moment," said M. de Treville, stopping

him; "I promised you a letter to the director of the Academy. Are you too proud to accept it, young gentleman?"

"No, sir," replied D'Artagnan; "and I will further promise you that the fate that overtook my father's letter shall not befall this, which I will take good care shall reach its destination; and woe be to him who shall attempt to deprive me of it."

M. de Treville smiled at this rodomontade, and leaving his young countryman in the embrasure of the window, where they had been talking, sat down to write the promised letter of introduction. In the meantime, D'Artagnan, who had nothing better to do, beat a march on the window, looking at the musketeers, as they proceeded in order, and watching them till they disappeared round the corner of the street. M. de Treville, having written the letter, and sealed it, approached the young man to give it to him; but at the very moment when D'Artagnan held out his hand to receive it, M. de Treville was astonished to perceive his *protégé* cut a caper, redden with anger, and rush out of the cabinet, exclaiming:

"'Od's blood! he shall not escape me this time!"

"And who is he?" demanded M. de Treville.

"It is he—the thief!" replied D'Artagnan. "Oh, traitor!" and he vanished.

"A confounded madman!" murmured M. de Treville, "unless it is, after all, a clever mode of giving me the slip, seeing that he has failed in his attempts."

CHAPTER IV.

D'ARTAGNAN VERSUS THE MUSKETEERS.

D'ARTAGNAN, raging, had passed through the antechamber in three bounds, and reached the staircase, which he was about to descend by four steps at a time,

when he suddenly ran full butt against a musketeer, who was leaving M. de Treville's dwelling by a private door, and dashing his head against his shoulder, made him utter a cry, or rather a howl. "Excuse me," said D'Artagnan, wishing to continue his course; "excuse me; I am in a great hurry."

But he had hardly descended the first step, before a hand of iron seized him by his cloak, and stopped him. "You are in a hurry!" exclaimed the guardsman, as pale as a sheet, "and under this pretext you dash against me. You say 'excuse me,' and think that is sufficient. But it is not so, my young man. Do you imagine, because you heard M. de Treville address us somewhat bluntly to-day, that any one may speak to us as he speaks? Undeceive yourself, comrade; you are not M. de Treville!"

"Upon my word," said D'Artagnan, seeing that it was Athos, who, after the attentions of the surgeon, was now returning to his apartments; "upon my word, I did not run against you on purpose, and not having done it on purpose, I said 'excuse me.' It appears to me, therefore, enough. Nevertheless, I repeat—and this time perhaps it is too much—that upon my honor, I am in a hurry, a prodigious hurry; loose me, therefore, I beseech you, and permit me to go about my business."

"Sir," said Athos, releasing him, "you are by no means polite; it is evident that you come from a distance."

D'Artagnan had already descended three or four steps, but at this remark of Athos he stopped short. "Sir," said he, "from whatever distance I may come, I assure you that you are not the individual from whom I should choose to receive a lesson in good manners."

"Perhaps not," replied Athos.

"Ah! would that I were not in such a hurry!" exclaimed D'Artagnan, "and that I were not running after some one!"

"Sir, you seem in a hurry; you will find me without running; do you comprehend?"

"And where may it please you?"

"Near des Carmes-Deschaux."

"At what hour?"

"About twelve o'clock."

"Very well, I will be there."

"Take care that you do not make me wait too long," said Athos, "for I tell you plainly at a quarter past twelve it is I that will run after you and cut off your ears for you."

"Good!" exclaimed D'Artagnan; "but I will take special care to be there at ten minutes before twelve."

And he commenced running again as if the devil was behind him, hoping still to catch the unknown, whose tardy pace could not yet have carried him out of reach. But at the corner of the street Porthos was talking with one of the soldiers on guard, and between these two there was just space enough for a man to pass. D'Artagnan fancied that this space was sufficient for him, and he shot forward to rush like an arrow between the two. He had not, however, made allowance for the wind, which, while he was passing, actually ingulfed him in the enormous cloak of Porthos, into which he fairly plunged. Doubtless Porthos had cogent reasons for not abandoning this essential portion of his dress; and so, instead of letting go the corner which he held, he drew it more closely toward him, so that D'Artagnan found himself rolled up in the velvet, by a rotary motion involved in this obstinate resistance.

D'Artagnan, hearing the musketeer swear, wished to escape from under the cloak, which completely blinded him, and sought for an outlet through the folds. Above all, he feared that he had injured the magnificent belt, of which we have heard so much; but on recovering his powers of vision he found his nose jammed against the shoulder of Porthos, that is, exactly on the belt. Alas! like the majority of fine things of this world which are only made for outward show, the belt was of gold in front, and a simple leather behind. In fact, Porthos, as proud as he was, being unable to afford a belt entirely

of gold, had procured one of which the half at least was of that metal. And this may perhaps account for the cold from which Porthos had avowed himself suffering, and the consequent need of the cloak.

"'Od's-bodikins!" cried Porthos, making every effort to free himself from D'Artagnan, "you are mad to throw yourself in this manner upon people."

"Excuse me," said D'Artagnan, reappearing from beneath the shoulder of the giant, "but I was in a hurry; I am running after some one——"

"Do you shut your eyes when you run?" demanded Porthos.

"No," answered D'Artagnan, somewhat piqued; "no, and, thanks to my eyes, I can see what others do not see."

Whether Porthos understood him or not, he yet gave way to his anger. "Sir," said he, "you will get yourself curried, if you thus rub against the musketeers."

"Curried, sir!" said D'Artagnan; "your expression is rash."

"It is such as becomes a man who is accustomed to face his enemies."

"Ah, by St. Denis," said D'Artagnan, "I know well that you would not turn your back upon yours!" and the young man, delighted with his joke, marched off, laughing outrageously.

Porthos was foaming with anger, and was hastening after D'Artagnan when the latter cried out:

"By and by, by and by, when you are quit of your cloak."

"At one o'clock, then, behind the Luxembourg!" shouted Porthos.

"Very well, at one o'clock," answered D'Artagnan, as he turned the corner of the street.

But neither in the street which he had just traversed, nor in that down which he looked did he see any one. Slowly as he had walked the stranger had disappeared. Perhaps he had entered some house. D'Artagnan inquired after him of every one he met; he even went down to the ferry, returned by the Rue de Seine and

La Croix Rouge, but no one in the least like the robber was to be seen. This racing about, however, was so far serviceable to him, that as the perspiration bathed his forehead his heart grew cool, and he then began to reflect on the events which had just transpired. They were numerous and inauspicious. It was scarcely eleven o'clock and already the morning had brought with it the loss of M. de Treville's favor, who must have deemed the mode in which he left him extremely rude; besides this, he had entangled himself in a brace of duels with two men, each of them capable of slaying three D'Artagnans; and, lastly, these duels were with two musketeers, with two of those very men whom he esteemed so highly that in his own mind he ranked them above all the world. The state of his affairs was desperate; certain of being killed by Athos, it is clear our youth had not much need to trouble himself about Porthos. However, as hope is the last thing which is extinguished in man's heart, he began to hope he might survive—it might be, to be sure, with terrible wounds; and under the impression that he should survive, he gave himself the following rebukes as a guard for the future: "What a hair-brained fellow I am! What a booby! This brave and unlucky Athos was wounded on the shoulder, against which I must therefore run full butt like a ram. The only thing which surprises me is, that he did not kill me at once. He would have been justified in doing so, for the pain I caused him must have been excruciating. As for Porthos,—oh! as for Porthos, upon my word, it is even more droll." And in spite of all his efforts to restrain himself, the youth began to laugh, at the same time looking round lest his solitary laugh, which to those who might see him must appear causeless, should offend any one passing. "As to Porthos," he continued, "it is even droller; but I am none the less a miserable ninny to throw myself thus upon people, without saying 'Take care.' And, besides, does any one look under a person's cloak to search for what no one supposes to be there? He would doubtless have pardoned me, had

I not spoken to him of that confounded belt. It was, it is true, only by insinuation—yes, insinuation. I' faith a pretty business! Foolish Gascon that I am—a pretty kettle of fish I have in hand. Come, my friend D'Artagnan," he continued, addressing himself with all the civility to which he thought himself entitled, "should you escape, which is not very probable, you must for the future be extremely polite; hereafter every one must admire you, and must quote you as a model. To be obliging and polite is not cowardly. Observe Aramis; he is softness and grace personified. And yet did any one ever pretend to say that Aramis was a coward? No; and for the future I will in all points make him my model. Ah! singular enough, here he is."

D'Artagnan, thus walking and soliloquizing, had arrived within a few paces of the Hôtel d'Aiguillon, and before this hotel he perceived Aramis talking gaily with three gentlemen of the king's guard. On the other hand, although Aramis perceived D'Artagnan, he had not forgotten that it was before this young man that M. de Treville had given way to passion, and a witness of the reproaches that the musketeers had received was by no means agreeable to him. He therefore pretended not to see him; but D'Artagnan, full of his new-formed plans of conciliation and courtesy, approached the four young men, making them a profound obeisance, accompanied by a gracious smile. Aramis bowed slightly, but did not smile. All four, however, at once ceased their conversation. D'Artagnan had acuteness enough to perceive that he was an intruder; but he was not sufficiently skilled in the ways of the gay world to withdraw himself dexterously from a false position, such as is generally that of a man who joins those he scarcely knows, and takes part in a conversation which does not concern him. He therefore sought about for some means of retreat which might be the least awkward, when he suddenly perceived that Aramis had dropped his handkerchief, and, inadvertently, no doubt, had put his foot upon it.

The moment appeared to be favorable for repairing

his malapropos intrusion; he therefore stooped down with the most graceful air imaginable, drew the handkerchief from under the musketeer's foot, notwithstanding the efforts he made to retain it there, saying, as he presented it to Aramis, "I believe, sir, this is a handkerchief which you would be sorry to lose."

The handkerchief was, in fact, richly embroidered, and had a crown and arms in one of its corners. Aramis blushed deeply, and snatched rather than took, the handkerchief from the hands of the Gascon.

"Ha, ha!" laughed one of the guards, "will you say now, most discreet Aramis, that you are on bad terms with Madame de Bois Tracy, when that gracious lady condescends to lend you her handkerchief?"

Aramis threw such a glance at D'Artagnan as makes a man understand that he has gained a mortal enemy. Then resuming his soft air, "You mistake, comrades," said he; "this handkerchief is not mine, and I know not why this gentleman has taken a fancy to give it to me, rather than one of you; and as a proof of what I say, here is my own in my pocket." So saying, he drew from his pocket his own handkerchief, a very handsome one, of fine cambric, although cambric at the time was very dear; but it was without embroidery, without arms, and adorned with a simple initial, that of its owner.

This time D'Artagnan uttered not a syllable. He had discovered his mistake. But the friends of Aramis would not allow themselves to be convinced by this denial; and one of them, addressing the young musketeer with an air of affected solemnity, said:

"If the fact is as you assert, my dear Aramis, I shall be compelled to demand possession of the handkerchief, De Bois Tracy being, as you are aware, one of my most intimate friends, and I should not wish any one to display his wife's property by way of a trophy."

"You make the demand with a bad grace," replied Aramis; "and on this ground alone, even were I to admit its justice, I should still refuse compliance with your request."

"The fact is," modestly observed D'Artagnan, "I did not see the handkerchief fall from the pocket of M. Aramis; but he had his foot upon it, however, and hence my reason for supposing that it belonged to him."

"And you were mistaken, sir," coldly replied Aramis, not very grateful for the apology. Then turning to the guardsman who had avowed himself the friend of De Bois Tracy, he added, "Besides, on reflection, my worthy comrade, I am as much a friend of De Bois Tracy as yourself, and this handkerchief, strictly speaking, might have come from your pocket as well as mine."

"No, upon my honor," said the royal guardsman.

"You swear by your honor, and I pledge my word, therefore, the one or other of us lies. But come, Monterau, let us do something better than indulge in counter assertions and denials: let each of us take half."

"Of the handkerchief."

"Yes."

"Perfectly fair!" cried the other two guardsmen; "decidedly a judgment after Solomon. Aramis, you are an oracle!" exclaimed the young men, indulging in hearty laughter; and the affair, as may be imagined, was thus deprived of further importance. Immediately afterwards the conversation ceased, and the friends separated with a cordial shaking of hands, the three guardsmen going one way and Aramis another.

"Now is my opportunity for making my peace with this brave man," mentally ejaculated D'Artagnan, who had kept somewhat aloof during the latter part of the conversation, and who now, impelled by this good feeling, approached Aramis, who was departing without taking any further notice of the youth.

"I hope, sir, that you will excuse me," said he, addressing Aramis.

"Sir," rejoined the latter, "you must permit me to remark that you have not acted in this affair as a gallant man."

"What inference, sir, am I to draw from this remark?"

"Why, sir, I take it for granted that you are not a fool, and that, although coming from Gascony, you must be well aware that no one walks upon pocket-handkerchiefs without sufficient reasons for so doing. Zounds, sir, Paris is not paved with cambric!"

"You do me injustice, sir, in thus endeavoring to humiliate me," said D'Artagnan, in whom the inherent love of quarreling began to operate more forcibly than his previous pacific intentions. "I am a Gascon, it is true; and, as you do not require to be informed, the Gascons are not very largely endowed with patience; therefore, when they have once apologized, even should it be for some imprudence, they consider that they have done half as much again as they ought to have done."

"What I have said to you, sir," retorted Aramis, "is not for the purpose of seeking a quarrel with you. Thank God, I am no bully; and being a musketeer only for the time being, I never fight except when I am compelled, and then with the utmost reluctance. This, however, is a serious affair, for you perceive that a lady is compromised by your conduct."

"Say, rather, by *your* conduct," cried D'Artagnan.

"Why did you perpetrate such a rustic jest as to give me this handkerchief?"

"Why were you so awkward as to let it fall?"

"I have declared, and I repeat, sir, that this handkerchief did not come from my pocket."

"Well, then, you have twice lied; for I myself saw it fall from your pocket."

"Ah, is this the tone you choose to assume, Sir Gascon? Well, I must teach you how to behave better."

"And I will send you back to your cassock, M. Abbé. Draw, please, and instantly."

"No, I thank you, my fine fellow; not here, at any rate. Do you not perceive that we are opposite the Hôtel d'Aiguillon, which is full of the cardinal's creatures? In fact, who can say that it is not his eminence who has commissioned you to procure my head for him? Now as it happens that I entertain what may appear a

ridiculous affection for my head, provided it remains tolerably firm on my shoulders, I wish, before parting with it, to kill you. But keep yourself quite easy on that score; I will kill you very gently, in a retired and secret spot, where you may not be able to boast of your death to any one."

"I am quite agreeable," replied D'Artagnan, "but do not be too confident; and here, take your handkerchief, whether it belongs to you or not; probably you may have occasion for it."

"Spoken like a true Gascon, sir," said Aramis.

"Yes; but that is no reason why you should postpone our little affair, unless, indeed, you are influenced by prudential motives."

"I well know that prudence, although indispensable to churchmen, is a virtue unknown to musketeers," replied Aramis, "and being, as I have informed you, only a soldier for the nonce, I am resolved to remain prudent. At two o'clock I shall have the honor of awaiting you at M. de Treville's, where I will conduct you to a more convenient spot."

The two young men then bowed to each other and parted. Aramis proceeded toward the Luxembourg; whilst D'Artagnan, finding that the hour approached, took the road to the Carmes-Deschaux, all the while inwardly ejaculating,—"Positively, I cannot escape! but if I am killed, at all events it will be by a musketeer."

CHAPTER V.

THE KING'S MUSKETEERS AND THE CARDINAL'S GUARDS.

D'Artagnan

D'ARTAGNAN knew no one in Paris. He therefore went to meet Athos without being provided with a second, having made up his mind to be satisfied with those that accompanied his adversary. Besides, he fully intended

to offer the brave musketeer an apology, which, whilst it should be suitable and proper, should at the same time bear no appearance of timidity. He also feared such a result from this duel as may be anticipated in an affair of this nature, where a young and vigorous man fights with an opponent who is wounded and enfeebled and in which, should the former be vanquished, the triumph of his antagonist is doubled; whilst, should he prove the conqueror, he is not only accused of being brave at small risk, but even his courage is regarded as extremely doubtful. Moreover, unless we have been unsuccessful in our attempt to portray the true character of our adventurer, the reader must have already remarked that D'Artagnan was not a man of the ordinary stamp. Therefore, although he could not divest himself of the idea that his death was inevitable, he had by no means resolved quietly to resign himself to his fate with that patience which one less courageous than himself might have displayed in similar circumstances. He pondered upon the different characters of those with whom he was about to fight, and at length began to obtain a clearer view of the situation. By means of the sincere apology which he contemplated, he hoped to make a friend of Athos, whose aristocratic air and austere manner delighted him. Then he flattered himself that he might intimidate Porthos by the adventure of the belt, which, if he were not instantaneously killed, he might relate to every one, and, by an adroit management of the story, overwhelm him with ridicule. Lastly, as regarded the quiet Aramis, he entertained very slight apprehensions; for, supposing that he should survive to fight him, he entertained no doubt of his ability to dispatch him handsomely, or, at all events, by wounding him in the face (as Cæsar recommended his men to do with Pompey's soldiers), to mar forever the good looks of which he was so justly vain. In fine, D'Artagnan now brought into action those principles of unconquerable resolve which the counsels of his father had implanted in his heart—counsels which, as we know, had

instructed him to submit to nothing approaching an indignity—unless it proceeded from the king, the cardinal, or M. de Treville.

Full of these ideas, he flew rather than walked toward the Convent des Carmes-Deschaux, as it was then called —a building without windows, adjoining a chapel of ease of the Pré-aux-Clercs, and surrounded by dry meadows, which generally served as a rendezvous for combatants who had no time to lose. As D'Artagnan came in sight of the small open space in front of the convent, it struck the hour of noon, and Athos had already been about five minutes on the ground. He was therefore most punctual, and the most rigorous casuist in the laws of dueling could have found, so far, nothing to censure.

Athos, who continued to suffer severely from his wound, although it had again been dressed by M. de Treville's surgeon, had seated himself on a large stone, where he awaited his adversary with that air of calmness and dignity which never forsook him. As D'Artagnan approached, he rose, and politely advanced some steps to meet him; whilst D'Artagnan, on his part, went toward his antagonist hat in hand, the plume trailing on the ground.

"Sir," said Athos, "I expect two of my friends who are to act as my seconds, but they have not yet arrived. I am surprised that they should be so late, as it is contrary to their custom."

"I have no second, sir," said D'Artagnan; "I only arrived in Paris yesterday; consequently I am unknown to any one here except M. de Treville, to whom I was introduced by my father, who has the honor to claim his friendship."

Athos mused for an instant, and then said, "So you know no one in Paris except M. de Treville?"

"No, sir; I know no one but him."

"Oh, then," continued Athos, partly speaking to himself, and partly to D'Artagnan, "if I should kill you I shall acquire the reputation of a child-murderer."

"Not entirely so, sir," answered D'Artagnan, with a bow which was not devoid of dignity; "not quite so; since you do me the honor to draw your sword against me whilst suffering from a wound which must cause you great inconvenience."

"Inconvenience! Upon my honor I assure you that you gave me excessive pain. But I will use my left hand, as I usually do under such circumstances. Don't imagine that I am doing you a favor, as I fight equally well with either hand. Indeed, it will be rather a disadvantage to you, a left-handed man being a very trying opponent to one who is not used to it. I regret, therefore, that I did not sooner apprise you of this circumstance."

"Really, sir," said D'Artagnan, again bowing, "you are so very courteous that I cannot be sufficiently grateful."

"You quite confuse me," replied Athos, with the air of a well-bred man. "If it be not disagreeable to you, pray let us converse upon some other subject. Ah! how you did hurt me! how my shoulder still burns!"

"Would you permit me—?" said D'Artagnan, somewhat timidly.

"To do what, sir?" inquired Athos.

"I have a salve which is a genuine panacea—a salve which my mother gave me, and the virtues of which I have tried upon myself."

"And what of it?" continued Athos.

"Why, sir, I am certain that in less than three days this salve would cure you; and at the end of that time, when your cure is completed, it would be a great honor for me to meet you."

D'Artagnan uttered these words with a simplicity which did honor to his courtesy, without in the slightest degree detracting from his courage.

"By my faith!" exclaimed Athos, "this is a proposition which much pleases me. Not that I should think of accepting it—but it savors of the perfect gentleman, and it was thus that, in the days of Charlemagne, those

brave men spoke, whom every man of honor should make his model. Unfortunately, however, we do not live in the days of the great emperor, but in those of the cardinal, and three days hence, however well we might preserve our secret, it would be known that we were going to fight, and it would be prevented. But," he added, with some impatience, "these lazy fellows do not come."

"If you are in haste, sir," said D'Artagnan, with the same simplicity that had the moment before characterized his proposition to put off the duel for three days,—"if you are in haste, and should wish to dispose of me at once, do not hesitate, I beseech you."

"This speech of yours pleases me still more," said Athos, gracefully bowing to D'Artagnan; "it is not the speech of a man who lacks either head or heart. I admire men of your stamp, and should we not kill each other, I shall hereafter have great pleasure in your acquaintance. Meantime, let us wait for these gentlemen, I pray you. I have plenty of time, and it will be more correct. Ah! you see, here comes one of them."

And as he spoke, the gigantic form of Porthos was seen at the end of the Rue de Vaugirard.

"What!" exclaimed D'Artagnan, "is M. Porthos one of your seconds?"

"Yes; is that unpleasant to you?"

"Oh, certainly not."

"And here is the other."

D'Artagnan looked in the direction indicated by Athos and beheld Aramis.

"What!" cried he, in a tone of yet greater astonishment, "is M. Aramis also one of your seconds?"

"Certainly; you are not aware that one is rarely seen without the other, and that amongst the musketeers and guards, at court and in town, we are known as Athos, Porthos, and Aramis, or the three inseparables? But as you come from Dax or Paix——"

"From Tarbes," said D'Artagnan.

"You may excusably be ignorant of all this."

"Really, gentlemen," said D'Artagnan, "you are well

named; and should my adventure become known, it will at least prove that your union is not founded on contrasts."

In the meantime Porthos approached, shook hands with Athos, and turning toward D'Artagnan, he seemed lost in astonishment. We may mention, in passing, that he had changed his belt, and laid aside his cloak.

"Ah! ah!" said he, "what is the meaning of this?"

"It is with this gentleman that I am about to fight," said Athos, pointing toward D'Artagnan, and at the same time saluting him.

"And I also am going to fight him," replied Porthos.

"But not till one o'clock," interrupted D'Artagnan.

"And I also—it is with him that I am to fight," said Aramis, who at the moment had arrived on the ground.

"Our appointment, however, is for two o'clock," replied D'Artagnan, with the same coolness.

"But what are you going to fight about, Athos?" demanded Aramis.

"Upon my faith, I do not well know, except that he hurt my shoulder."

"And you, Porthos?"

"I fight because I choose to," replied Porthos, coloring.

Athos, whom nothing escaped, perceived a slight smile curling the lips of the Gascon.

"We had a dispute about dress," said D'Artagnan.

"And you, Aramis?" demanded Athos.

"I fight on account of a theological dispute," answered Aramis, making a sign to D'Artagnan not to betray the true cause of their duel.

"Really!" said Athos, who observed a second smile play round the lips of D'Artagnan.

"Yes, a point of St. Augustine, on which we could not agree," said the Gascon.

"Decidedly he is a man of sense," murmured Athos.

"And now that you are all arrived, gentlemen," said D'Artagnan, "permit me to offer my apologies."

A cloud passed over the features of Athos, a haughty

smile glided over those of Porthos, and a negative sign was the reply of Aramis.

"You do not rightly understand me, gentlemen," said D'Artagnan, elevating his head, on which a sunbeam played, gilding its fine and manly lines. "I wish to apologize because it is improbable that I shall be able to pay my debt to all three; for M. Athos has the right to kill me first, which greatly decreases the value of your debt, M. Porthos, whilst it renders yours, M. Aramis, of scarcely the slightest value. Therefore, gentlemen, on that account alone, I again repeat my offer of apology. And now—*on guard!*"

And with the most gallant and reckless flourish he drew his sword. His blood was fairly roused, and at that moment he would have drawn his sword against all the musketeers in the kingdom with as little hesitation as he then did against Athos, Porthos, and Aramis.

It was a quarter past twelve, the sun was at meridian, and the situation chosen for the encounter was exposed to all its influence.

"It is very hot," said Athos, drawing his sword, "and yet I cannot take off my doublet, for just now I perceived that my wound bled, and I fear to distress this gentleman by showing him blood which he has not drawn from me himself."

"As for that," replied D'Artagnan, "I assure you that, whether drawn by myself or by any other person, I shall always see with regret the blood of so brave a gentleman; I will therefore follow your example, and fight in my doublet."

"Come," said Porthos, "a truce to these compliments. Remember that we also await our turn."

"Speak for yourself only, Porthos, when you utter such nonsense," interposed Aramis. "As for me, I consider the courtesies which have passed between these gentlemen as worthy of men of the highest honor."

"At your service, sir," said Athos, placing himself on his guard.

"I await your orders," said D'Artagnan, crossing swords.

But the two rapiers had scarcely met, when a party of the cardinal's guards, commanded by M. de Jussac, appeared at the corner of the convent.

"The cardinal's guards!" exclaimed Porthos and Aramis at the same moment. "Your swords to their scabbards, gentlemen—your swords to their scabbards!"

But it was too late. The combatants had been seen in a position which left no doubt of their intentions.

"Halloo!" cried Jussac, advancing toward them, and giving a signal to his men to do the same. "Halloo! musketeers! What, fighting here? And the edicts—are they forgotten, eh?"

"You are extremely generous, gentlemen of the guards," said Athos, in a tone of the most bitter animosity, for Jussac had been one of the aggressors on the night before last. "If we saw you fighting, I promise you that we should not prevent it; therefore, let us alone, and you will reap the pleasure without any of the pain."

"Gentlemen," answered Jussac, "it is with regret I declare that what you request is impossible. Duty must take precedence of everything else. Put up your swords, therefore, if you please, and follow us."

"Sir," said Aramis, parodying Jussac's manner, "if it depended upon ourselves, we should accept your polite invitation with the utmost pleasure; but, unfortunately, it is impossible. M. de Treville has forbidden it. Move on, therefore; it is the wisest thing you can do."

This mockery exasperated Jussac. "We will charge you," said he, "if you disobey."

"They are five," said Athos, in a low voice, "and we are only three; we shall be beaten again, and we must die here; for I positively swear that I will not again appear before the captain a vanquished man."

Athos, Porthos, and Aramis closed in on each other, whilst Jussac drew up his men. This moment of delay sufficed for D'Artagnan to form his resolution. It was one of those moments which decide the whole of a man's future life; it was a choice between the king and the cardinal, and a choice, once made, must be adhered to.

To fight was to disobey the law, to risk his head, and, by one blow, to make an enemy of a minister as powerful as the king himself. All this the young man plainly perceived, and we must do him the justice to declare that he did not hesitate a single instant.

"Gentlemen," said he, "you must allow me to correct one thing which you have said. You affirmed that you were but three; but it appears to me that there are four of us."

"You are not one of us," said Porthos.

"True," replied D'Artagnan, "I have not the dress, but I have the heart and soul of a musketeer; I feel it, sir, and it impels me along, as it were, by force."

"Hark ye, young man!" cried Jussac, who doubtless, from D'Artagnan's gestures and the expression of his countenance, had divined his intentions; "you may retire; we permit you; begone—and quickly."

But D'Artagnan moved not a step.

"You are unquestionably a brave lad," said Athos, pressing the young man's hand.

"Come, come, decide!" exclaimed Jussac.

"Let us do something," said Porthos and Aramis.

"You are truly generous," said Athos.

But all three thought of D'Artagnan's youth and feared his inexperience.

"We are but three, and one of us wounded, exclusive of this boy," remarked Athos; "and yet it will be said that we were four men."

"Ay, but to retreat!" said Porthos.

"It is difficult," said Athos.

"It is impossible!" cried Aramis.

D'Artagnan comprehended the cause of their irresolution. "Gentlemen," said he, "only try me, and I pledge you my honor that I will not leave this spot if we are conquered."

"What is your name, my fine fellow?" said Athos.

"D'Artagnan, sir."

"Well, then, Athos, Porthos, Aramis and D'Artagnan, forward!" exclaimed Athos.

"So you have made up your minds, gentlemen?" cried Jussac, for the third time.

"We have," said Athos.

"And what is your resolve?" demanded Jussac.

"We are about to have the honor of charging you," replied Aramis, raising his hat with one hand, and drawing his sword with the other.

"Ah! you resist?" cried Jussac.

"*Sangdieu!* does that surprise you?"

And the nine combatants rushed upon each other with a fury which did not, however, exclude a kind of method. Athos took Cahusac, one of the cardinal's favorites; Porthos selected Biscarrat; and Aramis found himself opposed to two adversaries. As for D'Artagnan, he discovered he had to contend against Jussac himself.

The heart of the young Gascon throbbed violently, not with fear, but eagerness. He fought with the fury of an enraged tiger, turning round his adversary, and every moment changing his guard and position. Jussac, as we have before said, was a most skillful swordsman, in constant practice; nevertheless he found the utmost difficulty in defending himself against his adversary, who, active and nimble, perpetually deviated from all the received rules of fencing, attacking on every side at once, and yet at the same time guarding himself like one who had the greatest respect in the world for his own person. At length the struggle was brought to a conclusion by Jussac's loss of temper. Furious at being thus held at bay by one whom he regarded as a mere boy, he became less cautious, and committed various indiscretions; whilst D'Artagnan, who, although deficient in practice, had a profound knowledge of the theory of the art, redoubled his agility. Jussac, eager to dispatch him, made a tremendous lunge, at the same time breaking ground; but D'Artagnan parried the thrust, and, whilst Jussac recovered himself, he glided like a serpent under his weapon, and passed his sword through his body. Jussac fell heavily on the ground.

D'Artagnan now cast a rapid glance over the field of

battle. Aramis had already killed one of his adversaries, but the other pressed him sharply; he was, however, in very good trim; and could well defend himself Biscarrat and Porthos had both received wounds, Porthos in the arm, and his adversary in the thigh; but as neither of these wounds was severe, they only fought the more fiercely. Athos, wounded afresh by Cahusac, looked very pale, but did not yield an inch; he had merely changed hands, and fought with his left. According to the laws of dueling at that period, D'Artagnan was at liberty to assist any one of his companions; and whilst he sought to ascertain which of them most required his aid, he caught a glance from Athos, which was eloquence itself. Athos would have died sooner than call for assistance; but his look plainly denoted how much he required support. D'Artagnan at once comprehended his meaning, and with a single bound he fell on Cahusac's flank, exclaiming, "Turn, sir guardsman, or I kill you!"

Cahusac did turn, and at the same instant Athos, whom his extreme courage had alone sustained, sank upon one knee. "Halloo, young man!" exclaimed Athos, "do not kill him, I beseech you; I have an old affair to settle with him when I am cured. Disarm him only; deprive him of his sword; that's it—good, good! magnificent!"

These exclamations escaped Athos on perceiving the sword of Cahusac flying from his hand a distance of twenty paces. D'Artagnan and Cahusac both rushed forward to secure the weapon; but D'Artagnan, being the more active, reached it first, and placed his foot upon it. Cahusac then seized the rapier of the guardsman who had been killed by Aramis and was returning to D'Artagnan; but on his way he encountered Athos, who during this momentary pause had recovered his breath, and who, fearing that D'Artagnan might kill his opponent, wished to renew the contest. D'Artagnan perceived that he would offend Athos if he did not permit him to have his own way; and in a few minutes Cahusac fell from a wound in the throat. At the same moment

Aramis placed the point of his sword at the breast of his fallen adversary, and compelled him to sue for mercy.

Porthos and Biscarrat alone remained fighting. Porthos, whilst fighting, indulged himself in a thousand fantastic jests and humors, asking Biscarrat what time of day it was, and congratulating him on the company his brother had just obtained in the regiment of Navarre. This jesting, however, gained him no advantage; for Biscarrat was one of those indomitable spirits who never yield except to death. It was time, however, to bring matters to a conclusion, as the guard might arrive, and arrest all the surviving combatants, whether wounded or not, whether royalists or cardinalists. Athos, Aramis, and D'Artagnan therefore surrounded Biscarrat, and summoned him to surrender. Although alone against four, and with a thrust which had passed through his thigh, Biscarrat refused to yield; but Jussac, who had raised himself on his elbow, ordered him to desist. Biscarrat, however, like D'Artagnan, was a Gascon: he therefore only laughed, and pretended not to hear; and finding time between the parries to point with his sword to the ground at his feet,——

"Here," said he, "will Biscarrat die, alone of those that were along with him."

"But they are four—four to one!" cried Jussac; "yield, I command you!"

"Ah, if you order me, it is another thing," said Biscarrat; "you are my commander, and I must obey."

And leaping suddenly backward, he broke his blade across his knee, in order that he might not have to give it up, threw the pieces over the wall of the convent, and then crossing his arms, he whistled a cardinalist air.

Bravery is always respected, even in an enemy. The musketeers saluted Biscarrat with their swords and returned them to their scabbards. D'Artagnan did the same; and then, assisted by Biscarrat, they carried Jussac, Cahusac, and the adversary of Aramis, who was only wounded, under the porch of the convent. The fourth, as we have said, was dead. They then rang the

bell, and carrying away four out of the five swords, they set off, intoxicated with joy, toward M. de Treville's hotel. They proceeded arm in arm, occupying the whole width of the street; and as they accosted every musketeer they met, the march soon became a triumphal procession. D'Artagnan's heart was in a delirium of exultation, as he marched between Athos and Porthos.

"If I am not yet a musketeer," said he to his new friends, whilst passing the threshold of M. de Treville's hotel, "I am at least received as an apprentice. Is it not so?"

CHAPTER VI.

HIS MAJESTY KING LOUIS THE THIRTEENTH.

THE affair made a great noise. M. de Treville gravely censured his musketeers in public; but privately they heard only his congratulations. As, however, it was essential that no time should be lost in making the king acquainted with the circumstances, M. de Treville hastened to the Louvre. But he was too late; the king was closeted with the cardinal, and M. de Treville was informed that his majesty was engaged, and could not then see any one. In the evening M. de Treville returned. The king was at play, and was winning; and his majesty being extremely covetous, he was in an excellent humor. Therefore, as soon as he saw M. de Treville, he exclaimed:

"Come here, my captain, that I may chide you. Are you aware that his eminence came to complain to me of your musketeers, and that his emotion has been so great, that he is actually ill from the effects of it? Well, really, these musketeers of yours are perfect devils—regular fire-eaters."

"No, sire," replied M. de Treville, who at the first glance saw the turn the affair was likely to take. "No, on the contrary, they are good creatures, gentle as

lambs, and who, I am confident, have only one wish, that their swords should never leave their scabbards save in your majesty's service. But what are they to do? The guards of the cardinal are continually seeking opportunities of quarreling with them; and, for the honor of the regiment, the poor young men are obliged to defend themselves."

"Hark ye, M. de Treville," said the king; "hark ye! Is this a religious fraternity, these men of yours, that you are speaking of? Truly, my dear captain, I am half inclined to deprive you of your command, and bestow it upon Mademoiselle de Chemerault, to whom I have promised the place of an abbess. Do not suppose, however, that I give entire credence to this apparently simple story of yours. I am called Louis the Just, M. de Treville; and soon, very soon, we shall see——"

"And it is because I confide in that justice, sire, that I shall calmly and patiently await your majesty's pleasure."

"Wait then, sir, wait then," said the king, "and I will not keep you long in suspense."

In fact, at that moment the chances of the game turned against the king, who began to lose what he had before gained. Therefore, he was not sorry to find an excuse (to use an expression of the gaming table, of which we confess we know not the origin) for playing Charlemagne. The king therefore rose, putting into his pocket the money which was before him, most of which he had won.

"La Vieuville," said he, "take my place. I must talk with M. de Treville on an affair of importance. Ah! I had eighty louis before me; lay down the same sum, that those who have lost may have no cause to complain. Justice before all things!"

Then turning toward M. de Treville, and walking with him toward a recess in one of the windows,—

"Well, sir," continued he, "you affirm that it is the guards of his eminence who seek quarrels with your musketeers?"

"Yes, sire, invariably."

"Well, and how did this affair happen? Relate the facts; for you know, captain, a judge must hear both parties."

"Oh! by my faith, in the most simple and natural manner; three of my best soldiers, whom your majesty knows by name, whose services you have often appreciated, and who, I can assure your majesty, are wholly devoted to your service—three of my best soldiers, Athos, Porthos, and Aramis, had made a party of pleasure with a young Gascon, a volunteer, whom I had introduced to them the same morning. The party was to be held at St. Germain's, I believe; and the rendezvous was fixed at Carmes-Deschaux, when it was interrupted by De Jussac, Cahusac, Biscarrat, and two other guardsmen, who doubtless did not assemble there in such force without some evil intention in opposition to the edicts."

"Ah! you give me ground for a conjecture," said the king; "doubtless they went there to fight among themselves."

"I do not accuse them, sire, but I leave your majesty to judge what five armed men could be doing in a spot so retired as is the neighborhood of the convent."

"Very true, Treville; yes, you are right."

"But, when they saw my musketeers, they changed their intentions, and forgot their individual and personal hatred, to indulge their enmity toward our corps; for your majesty well knows that the musketeers, who are wholly for the king, are the natural enemies of the guards, who are for the cardinal alone."

"Yes, Treville," said the king, grimly, "and it is a sad thing, believe me, thus to see two parties in France—two royal heads, as it were, under one crown. But this must be brought to an end. You say, then, that they picked a quarrel with the musketeers?"

"I say it is probable that this is the case, but I do not swear to it, sire. Your majesty well knows how difficult it is to discover the truth, unless, indeed, one

were gifted with that admirable penetration which has caused Louis XIII. to be named the Just."

"There again you are right, Treville. But your musketeers were not alone; there was a boy with them."

"Yes, sire, and a wounded man; so that three of the king's musketeers, of whom one was wounded, and this boy, not only made head against five of the most formidable of the cardinal's guard, but even bore four of them to the earth."

"Why, it is a brilliant victory!" exclaimed the king, radiant with joy; "a victory complete!"

"Yes, sire, as complete as that of the bridge of Cé."

"Four men—of whom one was wounded, and another a mere boy—do you say?"

"Scarcely of age, but who behaved so nobly on this occasion that I shall take the liberty of recommending him to your majesty."

"What is his name?"

"D'Artagnan, sire; he is the son of one of my oldest friends—the son of a man who was engaged in the Partisan war with the king, your father, of glorious memory."

"And you say this youth acquitted himself bravely? Tell me all about it, Treville, for you know I love to hear fine tales of war and bloodshed."

And the king composed himself in an attitude of attention, at the same time fiercely twisting his mustache.

"Sire," replied M. de Treville, "as I have already told you, M. d'Artagnan is almost a child; and as he has not the honor of being a musketeer, he was in plain clothes. The cardinal's guards, perceiving his youth, and also that he did not belong to the corps, invited him to retire before they commenced their assault."

"Thus we may clearly perceive, Treville," interrupted the king, "that it was the guards who began the attack."

"Most assuredly, sire; there cannot be a doubt upon the subject. They therefore warned him to retire; but he replied that, as he was at heart a musketeer, and wholly devoted to his majesty, he should stand by the king's musketeers."

"Brave youth!" murmured the king.

"And he did stand by them to some purpose—in him your majesty has the resolute and valiant champion who gave Jussac that terrific sword-thrust which has so much enraged the cardinal."

"He who wounded Jussac!" exclaimed the king. "He—a boy! Treville, it is impossible!"

"It is as I have the honor to inform your majesty."

"Jussac! one of the best swordsmen in the realm!"

"Yes, sire; but he has found his master."

"Treville, I must see this young man," said Louis; "I must see him; and if I can do anything—however, we will think about that."

"When will your majesty condescend to receive him?"

"To-morrow, at twelve, Treville."

"Shall I bring him alone?"

"No, bring all four together. I wish to thank them all at the same time. Men so brave are rare, Treville, and such devotion ought to be rewarded."

"At twelve, sire, we will be at the Louvre."

"By the private staircase, Treville, by the private staircase; it is unnecessary to let the cardinal know it."

"Yes, sire."

"You understand, Treville; an edict is always an edict; at all events, fighting is forbidden by the law."

"But this combat," said Treville, "is altogether different from the common duels; it was a sudden brawl; and the proof of it is, that there were five of the cardinal's guards against three of the musketeers and M. d'Artagnan."

"It is quite true," said the king; "but, nevertheless, Treville, come by the private staircase."

Treville smiled, conceiving that he had secured an important advantage by thus inducing the pupil to rebel against his master; he respectfully saluted the king, and, with permission, took his leave.

The same evening the three musketeers were apprised of the honor intended for them. As they had long known

the king, they were not much excited by the news; but D'Artagnan, with his Gascon imagination, saw in it his future fortune, and spent the night in golden dreams. By eight in the morning he was with Athos, whom he found dressed and ready to go out.

As they were not to see the king until twelve o'clock, and Athos had engaged to meet Porthos and Aramis at a tennis court near the Luxembourg stables, to play a match, he invited D'Artagnan to join them. Although ignorant of the game, D'Artagnan accepted the invitation, not knowing how otherwise to dispose of his time in the interval. Porthos and Aramis were already there, knocking the balls about. Athos, who was very skillful in all athletic games, took his place at the opposite side with D'Artagnan, and challenged them. But at the first movement which he made, although he played with his left hand, he found that his wound was too fresh to permit such an exertion. D'Artagnan therefore remained alone; and as he declared that he was too unskillful to play a regular game, they only sent the balls about, without counting the game. One of these balls, however, sent by the Herculean hand of Porthos, passed so near D'Artagnan as to satisfy him that, had it hit him full in the face, instead of flying on one side, his audience with the king would have been lost, as in all probability he would thereby have been rendered unfit to be presented. Now, since, in his Gascon imagination, all his fortune depended upon this audience, he politely saluted Porthos and Aramis, declaring that he would not renew the game until he was able to cope with them, and then took his station near the ropes.

Unfortunately for D'Artagnan, amongst the spectators there was one of the cardinal's guards, who, irritated by the previous night's defeat of his companions had resolved to take the first opportunity of avenging it. He now believed that this chance had come, and thus addressed his neighbor:

"It is no wonder," said he, "that this young man is afraid of the ball; he is, doubtless, a musketeer recruit."

D'Artagnan turned as if bitten by a serpent, and looked fiercely at the guardsman who had uttered this insolent remark.

"I' faith," continued the latter, proudly curling his mustache, "you may look at me as much as you please, my little gentleman. What I have said, I will maintain."

"And since what you have said is too plain to require any explanation," replied D'Artagnan, in a low voice, "I will thank you to follow me."

"Ah! indeed! and when, pray?" said the guardsman, with an air of mockery.

"Immediately, if you please."

"Doubtless you know who I am?"

"I have not the slightest idea, and, what is more, I don't care."

"And yet you are wrong, for if you knew my name, perhaps you would not be in such a hurry."

"Indeed! and pray what is your name?" said D'Artagnan.

"Bernajoux, at your service."

"Well, M. Bernajoux," replied D'Artagnan, with the utmost tranquillity, "I will await you at the gate."

"Proceed, sir; I will follow."

"But do not be in too great haste, sir," said D'Artagnan, "lest it should be perceived that we go out together; for, considering how we are about to be engaged, you must be aware that a crowd would prove inconvenient."

"What you say is quite right," replied the guardsman, much surprised that his name had failed to produce a visible effect on the young man.

The name of Bernajoux was indeed known to every one, except D'Artagnan, for he was one of those who constantly figured in the daily brawls which all the edicts of king and cardinal could not suppress.

Porthos and Aramis were so much occupied with their game, and Athos was watching them so attentively, that they did not even perceive the departure of their young companion, who, as he had promised, waited a

moment at the door for his opponent. In fact, D'Artagnan had no time to lose, considering the expected audience, which was fixed for twelve o'clock. He therefore cast his eyes around, and seeing that there was no one in the street,—

"Faith, sir," said he to his adversary, "although your name is Bernajoux, it is very fortunate for you that you have to deal with a musketeer recruit only. However, be content; I will do my best. On guard, sir!"

"But," said he whom D'Artagnan thus addressed, "it appears to me this place is badly chosen, and that we should be more at our ease behind the abbey of St. Germain, or in the Pré-aux-Clercs."

"You speak most sensibly," replied D'Artagnan, "but unfortunately my time is limited, as I have an engagement with the king precisely at twelve; therefore, draw, sir, draw!"

Bernajoux was not the man to wait the repetition of such a compliment. In an instant, therefore, his sword glittered in his hand, and he rushed upon his adversary, whom, on account of his extreme youth, he hoped to intimidate at the onset.

But D'Artagnan had served his apprenticeship the evening before, and now, fresh, and elated with victory, as well as buoyed up with hopes of future favor, he was fully resolved not to yield an inch. The two swords were therefore engaged, even to the guard, and as D'Artagnan kept his ground firmly, his adversary was obliged to retreat a single step. By this movement Bernajoux's sword deviated from the straight line, and D'Artagnan, seeing his opportunity, made a lunge which wounded his adversary in the shoulder. He immediately stepped back one pace and raised his sword; but Bernajoux, declaring it was nothing, made a blind thrust at D'Artagnan, and ran upon his adversary's sword. Nevertheless, as Bernajoux neither fell nor declared himself vanquished, but merely retreated toward the mansion of M. de la Tremouille, in whose service he had a relative, D'Artagnan, ignorant of the severity of his adversary's

wound, pressed him closely, and doubtless would have despatched him by a third thrust, had not the noise of their encounter reached the tennis court, from which now rushed, sword in hand, two of the guardsman's friends (who had heard him exchange words with D'Artagnan), and who fell upon the conqueror. But Athos, Porthos, and Aramis now also suddenly appeared; and at the moment when the two guardsmen attacked their young comrade, forced them to turn.

At that instant Bernajoux fell; and as the guards were then only two against four, they began to cry out,—"To our aid! Hôtel de la Tremouille!" At this cry the inmates rushed out, and fell upon the four friends, who, on their side, exclaimed,—"Help! musketeers!"

The latter cry was very common; for it was known that the musketeers hated the cardinal, and they were beloved for the very hatred they bore his eminence. Hence, in these quarrels, the guards of all the other regiments, excepting those actually belonging to the Red Duke, as Aramis had designated him, generally sided with the king's musketeers. Of three guardsmen of the company of M. des Essarts, who were passing, two came to the assistance of the four friends, whilst the other ran to the hotel of M. de Treville, crying, "Help! musketeers, help!"

As usual, M. de Treville's hotel was full of soldiers, who ran to the assistance of their comrades, and the skirmish became general. But the superiority of force was with the musketeers; and the cardinal's guards, with M. de la Tremouille's people, retired into the hotel, the doors of which they secured in time to exclude their opponents. As for the wounded man, he had been carried away, and, as we have said, in very bad plight.

The commotion amongst the musketeers and their allies was at its height, and they deliberated whether they should not set fire to the hotel, to punish the insolence of M. de la Tremouille's domestics, who had presumed to charge the king's musketeers. The proposition had been made and received with enthusiasm, when fortu-

nately it struck eleven o'clock ; and D'Artagnan and his companions, remembering their audience, and not wishing a feat so daring to be performed without their aid, succeeded in quelling the crowd. They contented themselves with heaving a few paving-stones at the impregnable door, and left the place. Besides, those whom they regarded as their leaders had just left them to proceed toward the hotel of M. de Treville, who, already aware of this fresh brawl, awaited their arrival.

" Quick, to the Louvre ! " said he, " to the Louvre, without losing a moment ; and let us endeavour to see the king before he is informed by the cardinal. We will narrate the affair as a consequence of that of yesterday, and the two will be disposed of together."

M. de Treville, accompanied by the four young men, hastened toward the Louvre ; but, to the great surprise of the captain of the musketeers, he was informed that the king had gone to hunt in the forest of St. Germain. M. de Treville caused this intelligence to be twice repeated, and each time his companions observed his countenance fall.

" Did his majesty form the intention of hunting yesterday ? " demanded he.

" No, your excellency," replied the valet. " The chief huntsman came this morning to announce that he had roused a stag ; at first the king said he would not go, but subsequently he could not resist the pleasure which the chase promised him, and he set out immediately after dinner."

" And has the king seen the cardinal ?" demanded M. de Treville.

" In all probability," replied the valet, " for this morning I saw the horses put to the cardinal's carriage ; I inquired where it was going, and was told to St. Germain."

" We are anticipated," said M. de Treville. " I shall see the king this evening ; but, as for you, I would not counsel you at present to run the risk of seeking the royal presence."

The advice was too reasonable, and, above all, came from a man who knew the king too well, to be opposed by the musketeers. M. de Treville therefore requested them to return to their respective homes, and await his orders.

On reaching his hotel, it occurred to M. de Treville that it would be prudent to forestall the cardinal by lodging the first complaint. He therefore dispatched a letter to M. de Tremouille, requesting the dismissal from his house of the cardinal's guards; and further, that he should reprimand his own people for charging the musketeers. M. de la Tremouille, however, being already prejudiced by his equerry, whose relative Bernajoux was, replied that neither M. de Treville nor his musketeers had a right to complain, but, on the contrary, he himself; the musketeers having not only attacked and wounded his people, but threatened to burn his mansion into the bargain. Now, as a dispute between those two great men might last a long time, each being likely to adhere obstinately to his opinion, M. de Treville thought of an expedient to bring it to a close; which was, to go himself to M. de la Tremouille. He therefore repaired to his hotel, and caused himself to be announced.

The two great men saluted each other politely, for, although they were not friends, they yet esteemed each other. They were both brave and honorable men; and as M. de la Tremouille was a protestant, and therefore rarely saw the king, he belonged to no party, and had contracted few prejudices in his social relations. On the present occasion, however, his reception of the visitor, though polite, was colder than usual.

"Sir," said M. de Treville, "we each believe that we have cause of complaint against the other, and I am here to see if we cannot together clear up the matter."

"Most willingly," replied M. de la Tremouille, "but I tell you beforehand, that I am well informed, and am satisfied that the blame rests with your musketeers."

"You are too just a man, sir, and too reasonable," observed M. de Treville, "not to accept the proposition I shall now make to you."

"Proceed, sir; I will hear your proposal."

"How is M. Bernajoux, the relative of your equerry?"

"Why, sir," replied Tremouille, "he is very badly wounded. Besides the thrust which he received in the arm, and which is not dangerous, he also received another which has passed through his lungs; so that the physician gives but a poor account of him."

"But does the wounded man retain his senses?" inquired Treville.

"Perfectly."

"Can he speak?"

"With difficulty, but still he *can* speak."

"Well, then, sir, let us go to him. Let us adjure him in the name of that God, before whom, perhaps, he is about to appear, to tell the truth. I will acknowledge him as the judge, even in his own cause; and whatever he says I will abide by."

M. de la Tremouille reflected for a moment; and as it would have been difficult to conceive a more reasonable proposition, agreed.

They therefore proceeded together to the chamber of the wounded man. When he saw them enter his apartment, he endeavoured to raise himself in bed, but was too feeble, and, exhausted by the effort, he fell back almost insensible.

M. de la Tremouille approached his bed, and by the application of some smelling-salts, restored him to consciousness. Then, in order to avoid any future imputation of having influenced the guardsman, M. de Treville invited M. de la Tremouille to question him himself.

The result was as M. de Treville had foreseen. Lingering, as he was, between life and death, Bernajoux had not the slightest idea of concealing the truth, and therefore related the circumstances precisely as they occurred. This was all that M. de Treville required; so wishing Bernajoux a speedy recovery, he took leave of M. de la Tremouille; and having regained his own hotel, immediately summoned the four friends to dine with him.

M. de Treville received the best company, but, c

course, all were anti-cardinalists. It may be readily imagined, therefore, that the conversation turned upon the recent defeats which the cardinal's guards had sustained; and as D'Artagnan had been the hero of the last two days, he received the congratulations; which Athos, Porthos, and Aramis observed with pleasure, not only as true comrades, but as men who had, on previous occasions, frequently received similar compliments themselves.

About six o'clock, M. de Treville announced his intention of proceeding to the Louvre; but, as the original hour of audience was past, instead of obtaining admission by the private staircase, he placed himself in the ante-chamber with the four young men. The king had not yet returned from hunting; but our friends had scarcely waited half an hour amongst the crowd of courtiers before the doors were opened, and his majesty was announced.

This announcement caused D'Artagnan to tremble with emotion. The decisive moment was at hand, upon which, in all probability, his future fate depended. His eyes, therefore, were fixed with intense anxiety on the door through which the monarch was about to enter.

Louis XIII. appeared, followed by his attendants. He was attired in his hunting dress, covered with dust; had on high riding boots; and, in his hand, he held a riding whip. At the first glance, D'Artagnan perceived that the king was in a violent rage. This humor, though distinctly visible in his majesty's features, did not prevent the courtiers from ranging themselves about the room; and as, in the royal ante-chamber, it is better to be seen by an irritable and angry eye, than not to be seen at all, the three musketeers did not hesitate to step forward, although D'Artagnan, on the contrary, concealed himself behind them as much as possible. Yet though Athos, Porthos, and Aramis were personally known to the king, he passed on as if he had never before seen them, without either looking at or addressing them. But when his eyes rested for a moment upon M. de Treville, the latter sustained the look with

so much firmness, that the king turned aside his gaze and, muttering to himself, entered his own apartment.

"The auspices are unfavorable," said Athos, smiling "we shall not be knighted this time."

"Wait here ten minutes," said M. de Treville, "and if I do not return to you in that time, proceed to my hotel, as it will be useless for you to wait longer."

The young men waited ten minutes, a quarter of an hour, even twenty minutes; and then, finding that M. de Treville did not return, they departed, much concerned at what had happened.

M. de Treville, who had boldly entered the royal cabinet, found his majesty in an unusually bad humor; he was seated in an arm-chair, venting his irritation by striking his boots with the handle of his whip. This, however, M. de Treville did not appear to notice, but with the utmost composure he inquired after his majesty's health.

"Bad, very bad," replied the king. "I am quite out of spirits."

This was, in fact, the special malady of Louis XIII., who often withdrew to a window with one of his courtiers, saying to him, "Come, sir, let us be miserable in company."

"I regret to find your majesty thus," said M. de Treville. "You did not, then, enjoy the pleasure of the chase?"

"Fine pleasure truly! By my faith, all goes to ruin, and I know not whether it is that the game is no longer so swift afoot, or the dogs have lost their scent. We roused a stag of ten tines. We ran him for six hours, and when we were on the point of taking him, and just as Saint-Simon was about to place his horn to his mouth, to sound his death note—*crac*, all the pack went off on the wrong scent, in pursuit of a brocket. You will then see that I must now renounce the chase with hounds as I have already relinquished it with falcons. Ah! I am a most unhappy king, M. de Treville; I had only one ger-falcon remaining, and *he* died yesterday."

"Truly, sire, I sympathize with your misfortune; it is, indeed, deplorable; but there are yet, I believe, a goodly number of falcons, hawks, and tercels remaining."

"But not a man to train them. The falconers are gone—all gone; and I alone preserve the true art of venery. With me, all will be lost, and the game will be taken by snares, pitfalls, and traps. Oh, had I only leisure to instruct somebody! But then there is the cardinal, who never leaves me a moment's rest, and who is always babbling to me of Spain, of Austria, and of England! But apropos of the cardinal, I am very angry with you, M. de Treville."

The latter had anticipated this turn of the conversation. From his long and intimate knowledge of the king, he was aware that complaints of this nature were only sort of prelude, so to speak, to arouse his majesty's courage to the proper pitch, and that he had now attained the point he desired.

"In what have I had the misfortune to offend your majesty?" inquired M. de Treville, feigning the utmost astonishment.

"Is it thus that you discharge your office, sir?" continued the king, without replying to his question; "was it for this that I created you captain of my musketeers—that they should assassinate a man, excite a whole neighborhood, and threaten to burn all Paris, without your saying a word to me on the subject? However," added the king, "no doubt you have come here to accuse yourself, and, having committed all the rioters to safe custody, to inform me that justice has been satisfied."

"Sire," said M. de Treville, with the utmost composure, "I am, on the contrary, come to demand justice."

"Against whom?" exclaimed the king.

"Against my calumniators," replied M. de Treville.

"Ah! this is something quite new," rejoined the king. "Do you mean to say that your three confounded musketeers and your Béarnese recruit did not rush like madmen on poor Bernajoux, and so ill-treat him, that he is probably now dying? Do you also

pretend to say that they did not lay siege to the hotel of the Duke de la Tremouille, and that they did not propose to burn it—which, during a period of war, would have been of little consequence, seeing it is merely a nest of Huguenots, but which nevertheless, in time of peace, sets a bad example? Can you deny these accusations?"

"And who has related to your majesty this fine story?" quietly demanded M. de Treville.

"Who has told me this fine story, sir? Who should it be, pray, but he who watches whilst I sleep; who labors whilst I amuse myself; who manages everything within and without the realm; in France, as well as in Europe?"

"Your majesty no doubt means God," said M. de Treville, "for I know of no other being who stands so far above royalty."

"No, sir; I speak of the support of the state, of my only friend, the cardinal."

"His eminence is not his holiness, sire!"

"What do you mean by that, sir?"

"That it is only the pope who is infallible; the infallibility which he possesses does not extend to the cardinals."

"You would say, then," said the king, "that he deceives me, you would infer that he betrays me?"

"No, sire," said M. de Treville, "but I say that he deceives himself; I say that he has been ill-informed; I say that he has been in a hurry to accuse his majesty's musketeers, toward whom he is unjust; and that he has not drawn his information from authentic sources."

"The accusation comes from M. de la Tremouille—from the duke himself; what say you to that?" asked the king.

"I might say that he is too deeply interested in the question to be an impartial witness; but far from that, sire, I know the duke for a loyal gentleman, and, on one condition, I willingly refer to him."

"And what is that?" said the king.

"It is that your majesty will send for him; will question him, but by yourself, face to face, without witnesses; and that I may see your majesty as soon as you have parted from the duke."

"Ay, marry, indeed!" said the king; "and you will be judged by what the duke may say?"

"Yes, sire."

"You will accept his judgment?"

"Without hesitation!" replied Treville.

"And will you submit to such reparations as he may require?"

"Entirely."

"La Chesnaye!" exclaimed the king. "La Chesnaye, send some one immediately for M. de la Tremouille. I wish to consult him at once."

"Your majesty gives me your word that you will not speak with any one between M. de la Tremouille and myself?"

"With no one, on the word of a gentleman!" replied the king.

"To-morrow, then, sire?"

"To-morrow, sir!"

"At what hour will it please your majesty?"

"At any hour!"

"But in coming too early in the morning I fear I may wake your majesty."

"Wake me? Do I sleep? I never sleep now, sir! I may dream sometimes, nothing more. Come as early as you like, at seven o'clock if you choose; but woe be to you if your musketeers are in the wrong."

"If my musketeers are guilty, sire, the guilty shall be delivered up to your majesty, who shall order everything at your pleasure. Does your majesty require anything else? You have but to speak, and you shall be obeyed!"

"No, sir, no! It is not without reason that I have been named Louis the Just. Farewell, then, till to-morrow, sir! Farewell!"

"May God preserve your majesty!"

However little the king might sleep, M. de Trevil slept even less. He had told the musketeers and the comrade to be with him at half-past six in the morning and he took them with him without telling them any thing, or making any promise, confessing to them tha their favor, as well as his own, was not worth more tha the chances of a cast of dice.

He left them at the foot of the staircase. If the kin remained angry with them, they were to go away witl out being seen; and if his majesty consented to receiv them, they would be ready at a call.

On entering the king's ante-chamber, M. de Trevil found Chesnaye there, who informed him that M. de Tremouille could not be found the evening before, an returned too late to be presented at the Louvre; tha he had, in fact, just arrived, and was now with the kin

This circumstance much pleased M. de Treville, wh was certain from this that no false suggestion could h insinuated between M. de la Tremouille's deposition an his own audience. Scarcely, indeed, had ten minute elapsed before the door of the king's cabinet opened, an De Treville saw M. de la Tremouille come out. Th duke immediately said to him,—

"M. de Treville, his majesty sent for me to inqui into the circumstances that happened yesterday morn ing at my hotel. I have told him the truth, that th fault lay with my people, and that I was ready to mak you my excuses. As I have met you, will you no receive them, and do me the favor always to consid me one of your friends?"

"Sir," said M. de Treville, "I was so convinced your loyalty, that I did not wish for any other defend with his majesty than yourself. I see that I did n deceive myself, and I thank you that there is still o man in France of whom I may safely say what I hav said of you."

"It is well, it is well," said the king, who had hea all these compliments. "Only tell him, Treville, sin he desires your friendship, that I also wish for his, b

that he neglects me; that it is just three years since I have seen him; and that he only comes to me when I send for him. Tell him this for me, for those are the kind of things which a king cannot say for himself."

"Thanks, sire, thanks!" exclaimed the duke. "But let me assure your majesty that it is not those (I do not refer to M. de Treville) whom you see every day, who are the most devoted to you."

"Ah! you heard what I said! So much the better, duke! so much the better!" said the king, advancing toward the door. "Ah, it is you, Treville! where are the musketeers? I told you the day before yesterday to bring them. Why are they not here?"

"They are below, sire, and with your permission, Chesnaye will call them up."

"Yes, yes! lest them come directly; it will soon be eight o'clock, and at nine I expect a visit. Go, duke! and above all things, do not forget your way back. Come in, Treville!"

The duke bowed and departed. The moment that he opened the door, the three musketeers and D'Artagnan, conducted by Chesnaye, appeared at the top of the stairs.

"Come, my brave fellows!" said the king. "I must scold you!"

The musketeers approached, bowing, D'Artagnan following behind.

"What! the devil!" continued the king; "seven of his eminence's guards regularly doubled up by you four in two days! It is too many, gentlemen; it is too many; at this rate, his eminence will have to renew his regiment in three weeks, and I shall have to enforce the edicts in their full rigor. I say nothing of *one* by chance; but seven in two days, I repeat, are too many, a great deal too many."

"But your majesty perceives that they have come in sorrow and repentance, to excuse themselves."

"In sorrow and repentance!" said the king. "I do not put much trust in their hypocritical faces. There is,

above all, a Gascon face in the background there! Come here, you, sir!"

D'Artagnan, who comprehended that this last compliment was meant for him, approached his majesty with a despondent air.

"What! You mean to tell me, then, that it was this youth—a mere boy, M. de Treville, a mere boy—who gave that terrible wound to Jussac?"

"And those two magnificent sword-thrusts to Bernajoux!" said M. de Treville.

"Really!"

"Without reckoning," said Athos, "that if he had not rescued me from the hands of Biscarrat, I should certainly not have the honor of paying my very humble reverence to your majesty."

"Why, M. de Treville, this Béarnese must be the very devil. *Ventre-saint-gris!* as my father would have said, at this rate many doublets will be riddled, many swords broken. Now, the Gascons are always poor, are they not?"

"Sire, I must say that they have not yet found mines of gold in their mountains, though the Almighty perhaps owed them that recompense for the manner in which they supported your royal father's cause."

"Which is to say, is it not, Treville, that it was the Gascons who made me king, as I am my father's son? Well, let it be so; I will not contradict it. La Chesnaye, go and see if by rummaging my pockets you can find forty pistoles; and if you find them bring them to me. And now let me hear, young man, with your own hand on your heart, how this affair happened!"

D'Artagnan told all the circumstances of the adventure; how, not being able to sleep, from the expectation of seeing his majesty, he went to his friend's house three hours before the time of the audience; how they went together to the tennis court; and how, on account of the fear he betrayed of being struck upon his face by a ball, he had been rallied by Bernajoux, who had narrowly escaped paying for his raillery with his life; and

M. de la Tremouille, who had nothing to do with it, with the loss of his hotel.

"It is exactly so," murmured the king; "yes, it is exactly as the duke recounted the affair. Poor cardinal! Seven men in two days, and seven of his most valued soldiers, too! But this is sufficient, gentlemen; do you understand? You have taken your revenge for the Rue Ferou, and more than sufficiently. You must now rest satisfied."

"So we are, if your majesty is," said Treville.

"Yes! I am," replied the king; and taking a handful of gold from the hand of Chesnaye, and putting it into D'Artagnan's, he added, "there is a proof of my satisfaction."

At that period, the independent notions which are now current were not yet in fashion. A gentleman received money from the king's hand without being humiliated. D'Artagnan, therefore, put the forty pistoles into his pocket, without further ceremony than warmly thanking his majesty for the gift.

"There," said the king, examining his watch, "now that it is half-past eight, retire. I have told you that I expect some one at nine. Thanks for your devotion, gentlemen! I may rely upon it, may I not?"

"Oh, sire!" replied the four at once; "we will allow ourselves to be cut in pieces for your majesty!"

"Well! well! But it will be much better to remain whole; you will be far more useful to me in that state. Treville," added the king, in a low voice, as the others retired, "you have no situation vacant in the musketeers, and as we have decided that it should be necessary to pass a certain probation before entering that corps, place this young man in your brother-in-law, M. des Essarts's company of guards. Ah! I quite enjoy the thought of the grimace that the cardinal will make; he will be furious; but it is all one to me, I am within my rights."

The king bowed to Treville, who joined his musketeers, whom he found sharing the forty pistoles his majesty had given D'Artagnan.

The cardinal was in reality as furious as his mast had anticipated; so angry, in fact, that for eight da he was not present at his majesty's play. But this d not prevent the king from putting on the most charmi smile, and asking, every time he met him, in an insinua ing tone:

"Well! M. le Cardinal! how is your poor Bern joux? and the unfortunate Jussac?"

CHAPTER VII.

THE MUSKETEERS AT HOME.

When D'Artagnan had left the Louvre, and had co sulted his friends what he ought to do with his porti of the forty pistoles, Athos advised him to order a goo dinner, Porthos, to hire a lackey, and Aramis, to tal a suitable mistress.

The repast was arranged for that very day; and t lackey waited at table. The dinner had been ordere by Athos; and the lackey, who had been provided b Porthos, was a native of Picardy, whom the glorio musketeer had enlisted for the occasion, having foun him sauntering about on the bridge of Latournell Porthos pretended that this occupation of doing nothi was proof of a meditative organization, and had hire him without any other recommendation. The magni cent appearance of the gentleman, on whose account thought he had been hired, dazzled Planchet, for th was the name of the Picard; he had indeed been slight disappointed when he found, on his arrival, that t situation he expected was already held by a broth lackey of the name of Musqueton, and when Porth told him that his family arrangements, though on large scale, did not admit of two servants, and that must therefore wait on D'Artagnan. But when attended at the dinner which his master gave, a saw him, when paying, draw from his pocket a handf

of gold, he believed his fortune made, and thanked Heaven that he had fallen into the service of such a Crœsus. In that opinion he remained until the feast was over, and he had made up for his long abstinence upon the remnants. But, on making his master's bed, the fairy visions of Planchet vanished. There was only that one bed in the chambers, which consisted merely of an ante-room and bedroom. Planchet slept in the ante-room, under a coverlet taken from D'Artagnan's bed, with which D'Artagnan from that time forward dispensed.

Athos, on his part, had a valet, whom he had drilled to his habits in a manner peculiar to himself, and whom he called Grimaud. Athos was very taciturn. For four or five years that he had lived in the closest intimacy with his companions, Porthos and Aramis, these two had often seen him smile, but never remembered to have heard him laugh. His words were brief but expressive; saying what he wished to say, but no more; no ornaments or embellishments whatever. Although Athos was scarcely thirty, and was possessed of great personal and mental attractions, no one ever knew him to have an affair of the heart. He never spoke of the female sex; and although he did not interrupt such conversation in others, it was evident, from certain bitter misanthropical remarks, that it was disagreeable to him. His reserve, austerity, and silence made him seem almost an old man, and he had therefore accustomed Grimaud, that he might not interrupt his habits, to obey a simple gesture, or even a motion of his lips. He never spoke to him save in extreme cases. Sometimes Grimaud, who feared his master as a child dreads fire, but at the same time was greatly attached to him, believed he perfectly understood him, rushed forward to execute his orders, and did something directly contrary to what was wanted. Then Athos shrugged his shoulders, and, without putting himself in a rage, belabored him soundly. On such days he spoke a little.

Porthos, as is easy to see, had a character diametrically opposed to that of Athos; he not only spoke a great

deal, but in a loud voice. It must be owned, to do him justice, that it was of little consequence to him, whether any one attended to him or not; he talked for the mere pleasure of speaking, of hearing his own voice; and talked, too, of everything but the sciences, which he never alluded to, but to express the inveterate hatred he had from his infancy entertained toward learned men. He had not such an aristocratic air as Athos, and the sense of his inferiority on that point had, at the commencement of their connection, made him often unjust toward that gentleman, whom he endeavored to surpass by the splendor of his dress. But in his simple uniform coat, merely, and by the manner in which he carried himself, Athos took at once the rank to which he was entitled, and relegated the foppish Porthos back to the second place. Porthos consoled himself by filling M. de Treville's ante-chamber and the guard-room of the Louvre, with the account of his conquests — a subject upon which Athos never spoke—and boasted of nothing less than a foreign princess, who was deeply enamored of him.

An old proverb says: "Like master, like man." Let us then pass from the valet of Athos to the valet of Porthos, from Grimaud to Musqueton. Musqueton was a Norman, whose pacific name of Boniface his master had changed to the more sonorous and warlike title of Musqueton. He had entered Porthos's service on the sole condition of being lodged and clothed, but in a sumptuous manner; and he only demanded two hours a day to provide for his other wants. Porthos had accepted the bargain, and things went wonderfully well. He had his old doublets and cloaks cut up and turned in a manner that made Musqueton cut a very good figure.

As to Aramis, whose character we believe we have sufficiently explained and which, as well as those of his comrades, we shall more fully develop hereafter, his lackey was named Bazin. Thanks to the hopes which his master entertained of some day taking orders, he was always dressed in black, as became a churchman's

servant. He was of the province of Berri; thirty-five or forty years of age; mild, peaceable and fat; and passed his leisure in reading pious works. He was dexterous in preparing a dinner for two; of excellent quality, though a few dishes. In all else he was dumb, blind, deaf and of approved fidelity.

Now that we know, at least superficially, the masters and the men, let us turn to their habitations.

Athos dwelt in the Rue Ferou, at two paces from the Luxembourg. His habitation, or lodging, consisted of two small rooms in a very neatly furnished house, whose mistress was yet young and pretty, though she ogled him in vain. Some few fragments of long-departed splendor adorned the walls of this modest dwelling; such as a richly mounted sword, which seemed of the period of Francis I., and of which the handle alone, incrusted with precious stones, might be worth about two hundred pistoles, which, nevertheless, Athos, even in moments when he worst wanted ready money, could never be persuaded to dispose of or to pawn. This sword had long excited the ambition of Porthos, who would willingly have given ten years of his life for the possession of it.

One day when, as he said, he had an appointment with a duchess, he endeavored to borrow it of Athos. But his friend, without saying a word, emptied his pockets of all his money and trinkets, purses, points, and gold chains, and offered them all to Porthos; but as for the sword, said he, it was fixed to its place, and ought only to leave it when its master quitted the lodging. Besides this sword, he had the portrait of a nobleman, of the time of Henry III., dressed with great elegance, and adorned with the order of the Holy Ghost; and this portrait bore some slight resemblance to Athos, a certain family likeness which denoted that this great noble, a royal knight, was his ancestor. Lastly, a box of splendid jewelry-work, with the same arms as the sword and portrait, which made a central ornament for the chimney-piece, though greatly out of harmony with the rest of the furniture. Athos always carried the key of

this box; but one day he opened it before Porthos, and Porthos could bear witness that it contained only letters and papers; love-letters and family records, no doubt.

Porthos inhabited a lodging of vast size, and of most sumptuous appearance, in the Rue du Vieux Colombier. Every time Porthos passed the windows of this house, at one of which Musqueton always appeared in splendid livery, he raised his head and his hand, saying, "Behold my habitation!" But no one ever found him at home, nor did he ever ask any one in; and it was therefore impossible to form an idea of the reality of those riches which this magnificent exterior promised.

As for Aramis, he dwelt in a small apartment comprising a boudoir, a dining-room, and a sleeping-chamber which were situated on the ground floor, and led into a small garden, fresh, green, shady, and impenetrable to the eyes of the surrounding neighborhood.

We have already had occasion to know how D'Artagnan was lodged, and have formed an acquaintance with his lackey, Master Planchet.

D'Artagnan, who was naturally very curious, as men of talent often are, made every effort to find out who Athos, Porthos, and Aramis really were; for under these assumed appellations, each of these young men concealed his real name.

It was evident they were men of some consequence, too particularly Athos, who might be known as a nobleman a quarter of a mile off. He therefore tried from Porthos to get some information concerning Athos and Aramis, and assailed Aramis to find out something concerning Porthos.

Unfortunately, Porthos knew no more of the life of his silent comrade than the little that has transpired. It was said that he had met with great misfortunes in love, and that a terrible treachery had forever poisoned the happiness of this gallant man. What this treachery was, no one knew.

As for Porthos, except his real name, which M. de Treville alone was acquainted with, as well as with those of his two comrades also, his life was easily un-

veiled. Vain and indiscreet, he was as readily seen through as crystal. The only thing that might have misled the investigator would have been a belief in all the virtues that he claimed.

As for Aramis, with every appearance of entire openness, he was enveloped in mystery. He replied but little to the questions put to him about others, and entirely eluded those which related to himself. One day, D'Artagnan having questioned him a long time about Porthos, and having learned the report of his love affair with a princess, wished to ascertain something of a similar nature as regarded himself.

"And you, my dear companion," said he, "I have an opinion that you are familiar with coats of arms; witness a certain handkerchief, to which I owe the honor of your acquaintance."

Aramis was not angry this time, but he put on a most modest air, and said, affectedly: "My dear fellow, do not forget that I hope some day to enter the church, and that I fly from all worldly things. That handkerchief was never given to me, but was left by mistake at my house by one of my friends. I was obliged to take it for fear of compromising him and his lady-love. As for myself, I have no mistress, and do not want one; I follow in this the very wise example of Athos."

"But what the devil!—you are not an abbé, but a musketeer!" exclaimed D'Artagnan.

"A musketeer, my dear fellow, for a time, as the cardinal says; a musketeer, against my will, but a churchman at heart, believe me. Athos and Porthos have foisted me on the guards merely to occupy my time. I had, at the moment I was going to be ordained, a slight difficulty with—but that does not much interest you, and I take up your valuable time."

"Not at all," said D'Artagnan; "it interests me much, and I have at present actually nothing to do."

"Yes, but I have my breviary to say," replied Aramis; "then some verses to compose, which Madame d'Aiguillon has requested of me; then I must go into the Rue

St. Honoré, to buy some rouge for Madame de Che vreuse; so you see, my dear friend, that if you are no in a hurry, I am;" and Aramis, tenderly pressing hi young companion's hand, took leave of him.

D'Artagnan could not, with all his pains, learn an more of his three new friends; he therefore determine to believe all that was at present said of their past lif and hope for better and fuller information in the future In the meantime he considered Athos an Achilles, Po thos an Ajax, and Aramis a Joseph!

The days of the four young men passed happily o Athos played, and always with ill-luck; yet he neve borrowed a sou of his friends, although his own purs was always at their service. And when he played c credit he always awoke his creditor at six in the mor ing, to pay him the debt of the evening before. Porth had his humors: one day, if he gained, he was insole and generous; and when he lost he disappeared entire for a time, and then came back, wan and thin, but wi his pockets stored with coin. As for Aramis, he nev played. He was the worst musketeer and the mo unpleasant guest possible. He always wanted to study even in the middle of dinner, when all expected to ke him in the midst of the wine and company for two three hours, out came his watch and he would say rising with a graceful smile, and taking leave of t company—that he must consult a casuist with who he had an appointment. Or he would go home, oste sibly to write an essay—begging his friends not to bre in and interrupt him.

Planchet, D'Artagnan's valet, nobly supported his go fortune. He received thirty sous a day, and, during month, returned to his lodgings as gay as a chaffinch, a affable to his master. When the wind of adversity beg to blow on the household of the Rue des Fossoyeurs that is to say, when Louis XIII.'s forty pistoles we eaten up, or nearly so—he began to utter complai which Athos found nauseous, Porthos indelicate, a Aramis ridiculous. On this account, Athos advis

D'Artagnan to dismiss the rascal; Porthos advised him to thrash him first; and Aramis declared that a master should never listen to anything but his servant's compliments.

"That is very easy for you to say," replied D'Artagnan; "for you, Athos, who live mutely with Grimaud and forbid him to speak, and, consequently, can never hear anything unpleasant from him; for you, Porthos, who live magnificently and are a sort of demi-god to your valet Musqueton; for you, Aramis, who, being always engaged in thought, make your servant, Bazin, who is a mild, religious man, respect you; but I—who am without stability, or resources—I, who am neither musketeer nor guardsman—what can I do to inspire Planchet with affection, terror, or respect?"

"The matter is serious," answered the three friends; "it is an affair of domestic consequence. With valets, as with women, it is necessary to have them under your thumb from the start, if you wish to keep them with you; let us therefore reflect!"

D'Artagnan reflected, and resolved to thrash Planchet provisionally; and this he did as promptly as he acted in other affairs. Then, after having drubbed him soundly, he forbade him to quit his service without his permission. "For," said he, "the future cannot be unfavorable to me; I have an infallible expectation of better times, and your fortune is therefore made if you remain with me. Yes! I am too good a master to let your prospects be sacrificed, by granting you the dismissal you demand."

This manner of proceeding gave the musketeers great respect for D'Artagnan's policy; and Planchet, too, was seized with equal admiration, and spoke no more of leaving him.

The days of the four young men passed in similar occupations. D'Artagnan, who had formed no habits whatever, as he had but just arrived from the country and fallen into the midst of a world entirely new to him, immediately assumed the customs of his friends.

They rose at eight in the winter and at six in the summer; and went to get the countersign for the day, and see what was doing at M. de Treville's. D'Artagnan, though he was not a musketeer, performed the duties of one with great punctuality. He was always on guard, as he always accompanied that one of his friends whose turn it chanced to be. Every one at the hotel knew him and regarded him as a comrade. M. de Treville, who, at the first glance, estimated his merits, and had a sincere affection for him, did not cease to recommend him to the king.

The three musketeers had, on their parts, a great affection for their young companion. The friendship which united these four men, and the necessity of seeing each other three or four times a day, whether for a duel or a party of pleasure, made them run after one another like shadows; and they were always to be seen seeking each other, from the Luxembourg to the Palace de Saint Sulpice, or from the Rue du Vieux Colombier to the Luxembourg.

In the meantime the promises of M. de Treville were fulfilled. One fine day the king commanded M. le Chevalier des Essarts to take D'Artagnan, as a recruit, into his company of guards. It was not without a sigh that D'Artagnan put on the uniform, which he would have exchanged for that of the musketeers at the cost of ten years of his existence. But M. de Treville promised him that favor after a novitiate of two years; a novitiate which, however, might be abridged, if he should find an opportunity of distinguishing himself with some brilliant action in the meanwhile. D'Artagnan retired with this promise, and entered on the new service the next day.

Then it was the turn of Athos, Porthos, and Aramis to mount guard, along with D'Artagnan, when the duty came to him. The company of M. des Essarts, therefore, on the day that it received the youthful Gascon, was recruited with four men in the place of one.

CHAPTER VIII.

A COURT INTRIGUE.

MEANTIME the forty pistoles of Louis XIII., like everything else in this world, after having had a beginning, had also an end; and, after the end, our four companions fell into difficulties. Athos at first supported the association from his own private funds; to him succeeded Porthos, and, thanks to one of his occasional disappearances, he supplied the necessities of his friends for about fifteen days. Lastly came the turn of Aramis, who performed his part with a good grace, on the strength of a few pistoles, procured, as he asserted, by the sale of some of his theological books. After all these resources were exhausted, they had recourse to M. de Treville, who made them an advance; but all this did not go very far with our musketeers, who were already in arrears; and the young guardsman had as yet no pay due. When they were at length almost destitute, they mustered, as a last resort, about eight or ten pistoles, which Porthos staked at play; but being in ill-luck, he lost not only their joint stock, but twenty-five more, for which he gave his word of honor. Their difficulties were thus transformed into actual distress; and the four half-starved soldiers, followed by their lackeys, were seen running about the promenades and guard-rooms, picking up dinners wherever they could find them; for—by Aramis's advice—whilst in prosperity they had sown repasts right and left, in order that they might reap some in the season of adversity. Athos received four invitations, and every time took his three friends and their lackeys with him; Porthos had six chances, in which, also, they all participated; but Aramis had eight, for he, as may be seen, was a man who did a maximum of business with a minimum of fuss. As for D'Artagnan, who scarcely knew any one in the capital, he only found a breakfast at the house of a Gascon

priest, and one dinner with a cornet of the guards. He took his little army with him to the priest's—whose two months' stock of provisions it nearly consumed—and to the cornet's, who regaled them splendidly, but, as Planchet observed, however much a man may devour it only makes a single meal.

D'Artagnan, therefore, was somewhat humbled at returning only one meal and a half—for the dinner with the priest could count as only a half meal—for the feasts which Athos, Porthos, and Aramis had procured him. He thought himself a burden to the society; forgetting, in his youthful sincerity, that he had supported all four for a full month. It was through this reflection that his mind was set to work. He conceived that this coalition of four brave, enterprising, and active young men ought to have some higher aim than idle walks, fencing lessons, and more or less amusing jests. In fact, four such men as they—so devoted to each other, with their purses or their lives; so ready to support each other without surrendering an inch; executing, either singly or together, the resolution they had formed in concert; menacing the four cardinal points at one time, or concentrating their united efforts on one common focus,—ought inevitably, either secretly or openly, either by mine or trench, by stratagem or force, to find a way to what they had in view, however well defended or however distant it might appear to be. The only thing that surprised D'Artagnan was, that this capacity had never yet occurred to his companions. He himself now thought of it seriously, racking his brain to find a direction for his individual power four times multiplied with which he felt assured that he might, as with the lever which Archimedes sought, succeed in moving the world. But his meditations were disturbed by a gentle knock at the door.

D'Artagnan roused Planchet, and told him to see who was there. But by this phrase of *rousing Planchet*, it must not be supposed that it was night. No! it was four in the afternoon; but two hours had elapsed since

Planchet, on coming to ask his master for some dinner, had been forced to be satisfied with the proverb,—

"He who sleeps, dines!"

And Planchet was at dinner on this economical fare.

A man of plain and simple appearance, who had the air of a citizen, was introduced.

Planchet would have liked, by way of dessert, to hear the conversation; but the man declared to D'Artagnan that what he had to say, being of consequence, and confidential, he desired they should be alone. D'Artagnan therefore dismissed Planchet, and begged his visitor to be seated.

There was a momentary silence, during which the two men regarded one another inquisitively, after which D'Artagnan bowed as a signal of attention.

"I have heard M. d'Artagnan mentioned as a very brave young man," said the citizen, "and this it is that has determined me to confide a secret to him."

"Speak, sir, speak!" exclaimed D'Artagnan, who instinctively smelled something profitable.

The citizen paused, and then continued: "I have a wife who is milliner to the queen, and who is not without wit or beauty. I was induced to marry her three years ago, though she had but a small dowry, because M. de la Porte, the queen's cloak-bearer, is her kinsman and patron."

"Well, sir?" demanded D'Artagnan.

"Well, sir?" replied the citizen, "she was carried off yesterday morning, as she left her work-room."

"And by whom has she been carried off?" inquired D'Artagnan.

"I do not know positively, sir," said the other; "but I *suspect* a certain person."

"And who is this person whom you suspect?"

"One who has for a long time pursued her."

"The devil!"

"But allow me to tell you, sir, that there is less of love than of policy in all this."

"Less of love than of policy?" exclaimed D'Artagnan,

with an air of profound reflection ; " and whom do you suspect ? "

" I scarcely know whether I ought to tell you his name."

" Sir," said D'Artagnan, " permit me to observe that I have absolutely demanded nothing from you ; it is *you* who have come to *me ;* it is you who told me that you had a secret to confide to me ; do as you please in the matter ; there is yet time to draw back."

" No, sir ; you have the air of an honorable man and I can trust you. I believe it is in consequence of no love affair of her own that my wife has been entrapped, but because of an amour of a lady of far more exalted station than her own ! "

" Ah, ah ! can it be on account of some affair of Madame de Bois Tracy ? " asked D'Artagnan, who wished to appear knowing in court affairs.

" Higher, sir, higher ! "

" Of Madame d'Aiguillon ? "

" Higher yet ! " said the citizen.

" Of Madame de Chevreuse ? "

" Higher still !—much higher ! "

" Of the——"

And here D'Artagnan paused.

" Yes ! " answered the frightened citizen, in such a low voice that he could scarcely be heard.

" And with whom ? " said D'Artagnan.

" With whom can it be, if not with the Duke of —— ? " replied the mercer.

" With the Duke of —— ? "

" Yes, sir," replied the citizen, in a still lower tone.

" But how do you know all this ? "

" How do I know it ? " said the mercer.

" Yes ! How do you know it ? No half confidence, you understand," said D'Artagnan.

" I know it from my wife, sir—from my wife herself."

" And from whom does she know it ? "

" From M. de la Porte. Did I not tell you that she is his god-daughter ? Well ! M. de la Porte, who

the confidential agent of the queen, had placed her near her majesty, that our poor queen—abandoned as she is by the king, watched by the cardinal, and betrayed as the poor lady is by all—might at any rate have some one near her in whom she could confide."

"Ah, ah! I begin to understand," said D'Artagnan.

"Now, sir, my wife came home four days ago. One of the conditions of our marriage was, that she should come and see me twice a week; for, as I have the honor to inform you, my wife is very fond of me. Well, sir, my wife came to tell me, in confidence, that the queen is at the present time in great alarm."

"Really?" said D'Artagnan.

"Yes! The cardinal, it appears, watches and persecutes her more than ever; he cannot pardon her the story of the Sarabande—you know the story of the Sarabande, sir?"

"Egad! I should think I do!" replied D'Artagnan, who knew nothing at all about it, but would not for the world appear ignorant.

"So that it is no longer hatred, now, but revenge!" said the citizen.

"Really!" replied D'Artagnan.

"And the queen believes——"

"Well! what does the queen believe?"

"She believes that they have written in her name to the Duke of Buckingham."

"In her majesty's name?"

"Yes, to entice him to Paris; and when they have got him here, that they mean to lead him into a snare."

"The deuce! But your wife, my dear sir—what has she to do with all this?"

"They know her devotion to the queen, and want to separate her from her mistress, and to intimidate her into betraying her majesty's secrets or seduce her into serving as a spy."

"It seems probable!" said D'Artagnan; "but, do you know the man who has carried her off?"

"I have told you that I believe I know him."

"His name?"

"I have not an idea what it is; all I know is that h is a creature of the cardinal—the minister's tool."

"But you have seen him?"

"Yes; my wife pointed him out one day."

"Has he any mark by which he may be recognized?

"Yes, certainly; he is a man of aristocratic appea ance and has a dark skin, a tawny complexion, piercin eyes, white teeth, and a scar on his forehead."

"A scar on his forehead!" cried D'Artagnan, "an with white teeth, piercing eyes, dark complexion, an proud air—why, that must be my man of Meung."

"Your man, do you say?"

"Yes, yes!" said D'Artagnan; "but that has nothin to do with the affair. Yet, no! it has, on the contrary a great deal to do with it, for if your man is mine also I shall at one blow perform two acts of revenge. Bu where can I meet with him?"

"I have not the slightest idea."

"Have you no clue to his abode?"

"None whatever. One day, when I accompanied m wife to the Louvre, he was coming out as we entered and she pointed him out to me."

"Plague on it!" murmured D'Artagnan; "this is a very vague. But how did you hear of the abduction o your wife?"

"From M. de la Porte."

"Did he give you any particulars?"

"He had none to give."

"You have got no information from other quarters?

"Yes, I have received——"

"What!"

"But I know not whether I am unwise in tellin you."

"You return to that doubt, but permit me to observ that it is rather too late to draw in your horns."

"I do not draw back," exclaimed the citizen, accom panying the assurance with an oath, to support hi courage; "besides, on the honor of Bonancieux——"

"Then your name is Bonancieux?" interrupted D'Artagnan.

"Yes, that is my name."

"You say on the honor of Bonancieux! Pardon this interruption, but the name appears not to be unknown to me."

"It is very possible, sir, for I am your landlord."

"Ah, ah!" said D'Artagnan, half rising, "oh, you are my landlord."

"Yes, sir, yes; and as for the three months that you have been in my house, diverted, no doubt by your great and splendid occupations, you have forgotten to pay me my rent, and as, likewise, I have not once asked you for payment, I thought that you would have some regard for me on account of my delicacy in that respect."

"Why, then, my dear M. Bonancieux," answered D'Artagnan, "believe me, I am grateful for such a proceeding, and shall, as I have said, be most happy if I can be of use to you in any way."

"I believe you, I believe you," interrupted the citizen; "and as I said, on the honor of Bonancieux, I have confidence in you."

"Then go on with what you began to tell me."

The citizen drew a paper from his pocket, and gave it to D'Artagnan.

"A letter!" exclaimed the young man.

"Which I received this morning."

D'Artagnan opened it, and as the light was beginning to fail, he approached the window, followed by Bonancieux.

"Do not seek for your wife," read D'Artagnan, "she will be returned to you when she is no longer wanted. If you make a single attempt to discover her you are lost."

"Well, this is pretty strong!" continued D'Artagnan; "but, after all, it is only a threat."

"Yes, but the threat frightens me, sir. I am anything but handy with the sword, and I stand in terror of the Bastile."

"Humph!" said D'Artagnan; "I do not like the

Bastile any more than you do; if it was only a sword-thrust now, it would be of no consequence!"

"And yet, sir, I was very sure that you would help me."

"Yes?"

"Seeing you always surrounded by musketeers of haughty carriage and perceiving that those musketeers belonged to M. de Treville, and, consequently, were the enemies of the cardinal, I thought that you and your friends, whilst rendering justice to our poor queen, would be enchanted at doing his eminence an ill turn."

"Unquestionably!"

"And then I thought that, owing me three months' rent, which I have never demanded——"

"Yes, yes, you have already mentioned that reason, and I consider it excellent—excellent."

"Reckoning, moreover, that as long as you will do me the honor of remaining under my roof, I should never speak to you about your rent——"

"Good, again!" said D'Artagnan.

"And added to that, calculating upon offering you fifty pistoles, should you, contrary to all probability, be at all distressed at this time——"

"Wonderfully good! You are rich, then, my dear M. Bonancieux!"

"I am in easy circumstances, sir—that is the term. I have amassed something like two or three thousand crowns a year in the linen drapery line, and more particularly by investing something in the last voyage of the celebrated navigator, Jean Mocquet; so that you understand, sir—Ah! but——" exclaimed the citizen.

"What?" demanded D'Artagnan.

"What do I see there?"

"Where?"

"In the street, opposite your window; in the opening of that gateway—a man wrapped in a cloak!"

"It is he!" cried D'Artagnan and the citizen in one breath, each at the same moment having recognized his man.

"Ah! this time he shall not escape me!" exclaimed D'Artagnan, rushing out, sword in hand.

On the staircase he met Athos and Porthos, who were coming to see him; they stepped aside and he passed between them like a meteor.

"Where are you running to?" cried the two musketeers.

"The man of Meung!" ejaculated D'Artagnan, as he disappeared.

D'Artagnan had more than once related to his friends his adventure with the stranger, and also the apparition of the fair traveler, to whom this man appeared to confide such an important missive. Athos was of opinion that D'Artagnan had lost the letter in the fracas, since a gentleman such as he had described the unknown to be must have been incapable of theft. Porthos only saw in the affair an amorous appointment, which D'Artagnan and his yellow horse had disturbed; and Aramis merely observed that things of this kind being mysterious, had better not be pried into. From the few words that escaped D'Artagnan, they understood, therefore, what he was about, and concluding that he would return, after he had found his man, they proceeded to his apartment.

When they entered the room which D'Artagnan had just quitted they found it empty; for the landlord, fearing the consequences of the meeting which he doubted not was about to take place between the young man and the stranger, had judged it wisest to decamp.

CHAPTER IX.

D'ARTAGNAN BEGINS TO SHOW HIMSELF.

As Athos and Porthos had foreseen, D'Artagnan returned in half an hour. He had again missed his man, who had disappeared as if by magic. The young Gascon had run

through all the neighboring streets, sword in hand, but found no one resembling him. Whilst D'Artagnan was engaged in this pursuit, Aramis had joined his companions, so that on his return he found the reunion complete.

"Well!" exclaimed they, when they saw him enter covered with perspiration and his face disfigured with rage.

"Well!" said he, throwing his sword on the bed, "this man must be the devil himself; he disappeared like a phantom, a shadow, a spectre!"

"Do you believe in apparitions?" asked Athos of Porthos.

"I only believe what I have seen; and as I have never seen an apparition, I do not believe in them."

"The Bible," said Aramis, "requires us to believe in them. The shade of Samuel appeared to Saul, and it is an article of faith which I am very sorry, Porthos, to hear called in question."

"Be as it may," said D'Artagnan, "man or devil, body or shadow, illusion or reality, this man is born to be my bane; for his escape has caused us to lose a fine opportunity—one, gentlemen, by which a hundred pistoles or more were to be gained."

"How is that?" asked Aramis and Porthos; but Athos, true to his principle of silence, merely interrogated D'Artagnan by a look.

"Planchet," said D'Artagnan, "go to my landlord, M. Bonancieux, and tell him to send me half a dozen bottles of Beaugency, which is the wine that I prefer."

"Ah, then, you have credit with your landlord?" demanded Porthos.

"Yes, from this day," said D'Artagnan; "and be assured that if the wine is bad we will send it back to him and have it changed for better."

"You should use, and not abuse," sententiously remarked Aramis.

"I always said that D'Artagnan had the best head of the four," said Athos, who, having delivered himself of

this opinion, which D'Artagnan acknowledged by a bow, relapsed into his usual silence.

"But now let us hear what is in the wind," demanded Porthos.

"Yes," said Aramis; "confide in us, my dear friend; at least, if the honor of some lady be not compromised."

"Be easy," replied D'Artagnan, "the honor of no one is in danger through what I have to tell you." He then related, word for word, what had passed between him and his landlord, and how the man who had carried off the worthy mercer's wife was the same with whom he had quarreled at the Jolly Miller, at Meung.

"The thing looks well," said Athos, after he had tasted the wine like a connoisseur and testified by an approving nod of the head that it was good. "Now it remains to determine whether it is worth while to risk four heads for sixty or seventy pistoles."

"But observe," said D'Artagnan, "that there is a woman in the affair; a woman who is carried off, and no doubt threatened, perhaps tortured, merely on account of her fidelity to her royal mistress."

"Take care, D'Artagnan, take care," said Aramis; "in my opinion you get too warm about the fate of Madame Bonancieux. Woman was created for man's undoing, and from her all our miseries arise."

Athos frowned and bit his lip, whilst he listened to this sapient piece of misogyny.

"It is not for Madame Bonancieux I am distressing myself," said D'Artagnan, "but for the queen, whom the king abandons, whom the cardinal persecutes, and who sees the heads of all her truest friends fall off in succession."

"But why will she insist on loving the people we most detest—the English and the Spaniards?" asked Athos.

"Spain is her country," replied D'Artagnan, "and it is but natural that she should love the Spaniards, children of her native soil. As to your first reproach, I have heard it said that she loves, not the English, but an Englishman."

"And indeed," replied Athos, "one must confess that Englishman is well worthy of being loved. I never saw a man of nobler air."

"Besides, you forget the matchless style in which he dresses," said Porthos. "I was at the Louvre the day he scattered his pearls, and I picked up two which sold for twenty pistoles. Do you know him, Aramis?"

"As well as you do, gentlemen; for I was one of those who arrested him in the garden at Amiens, where the queen's equerry, M. de Putange, had introduced me. I was at the seminary at that time, and the adventure appeared to me to bear hard upon the king."

"Which would not hinder me," said D'Artagnan, "if I knew where the Duke of Buckingham is, from taking him by the hand, and conducting him to the queen, if it were only to enrage the cardinal. The cardinal is our eternal enemy. If we could find the means of doing him some injury, I confess that I would willingly risk my neck to compass it."

"And the mercer told you, D'Artagnan," said Athos, "that the queen thought they had decoyed Buckingham into France by false information?"

"She fears so! And I am convinced," added D'Artagnan, "that the abduction of this woman of the queen's suite had some connection with the circumstances of which we are speaking, and perhaps with the presence of the Duke of Buckingham in Paris."

"The Gascon is full of ideas," said Porthos.

"I like to hear him talk," said Athos; "his patois amuses me."

"Gentlemen," said Aramis, "listen."

"Let us attend to Aramis!" exclaimed the three friends.

"Yesterday, I was at the house of a learned doctor of theology, whom I sometimes consult as to my studies"

Athos smiled.

"He lives in a retired spot which his tastes and his profession recommend; now, just as I was leaving his ——" Here Aramis hesitated.

"Well!" said his auditors; "just as you were leaving his house?"

Aramis appeared to make an effort, like a man who, in the full swing of telling a falsehood, finds himself suddenly arrested by an unforeseen obstacle; but as the eyes of his three friends were upon him, he could not by any means draw back.

"This doctor has a niece," continued Aramis.

"Oh! he has a niece," interrupted Porthos.

"Yes, a lady of the highest respectability," said Aramis.

The three friends began to laugh.

"Ah! if you either laugh or suspect, you shall hear no more," said Aramis.

"We are credulous as the Mohammedans, and dumb as sarcophagi!" said Athos.

"Then I will continue," said Aramis. "This niece comes sometimes to see her uncle, and as she was there by chance yesterday, at the same time that I was, I was obliged to offer to conduct her to the carriage."

"Ah! the niece of this doctor has a carriage," interrupted Porthos, whose chief fault consisted in having too long a tongue. "A *highly* respectable acquaintance."

"Porthos," said Aramis, "I have often intimated to you that you are indiscreet, and it does you no good in the eyes of women."

"Gentlemen," said D'Artagnan, who saw how the adventure arose, "the thing is serious; let us endeavour to avoid joking. Go on, Aramis, go on."

"All of a sudden a tall man, dark, and with the manners of a gentleman — like your man, D'Artagnan——"

"The same, probably," said the Gascon.

"It is possible," said Aramis. "However, he approached me, accompanied by six or seven men, who followed him at about ten paces' distance, and then, in the most polite tone, he said:

"'My lord duke, and you, madame,' addressing the lady——"

"What! the doctor's niece!" said Porthos.

"Silence, Porthos!" said Athos; "you are insupportable."

"'Please to enter the carriage without making the least resistance, or the slightest noise.'"

"He took you for Buckingham?" said D'Artagnan.

"I believe so," said Aramis.

"But the lady?" said Porthos.

"He took her for the queen," said D'Artagnan.

"Just so!" said Aramis.

"This Gascon is the devil!" cried Athos; "nothing escapes him!"

"The fact is," said Porthos, "that Aramis is about the height, and has something of the figure of the handsome duke; and yet one would think that the dress of a musketeer——"

"I had on an enormous cloak!"

"In the month of July? Excellent!" cried Porthos; "was the doctor afraid that you might be recognized?"

"I can imagine," said Athos, "that the spy might be deceived by the figure, but the face?"

"I was wearing a broad-brimmed hat," replied Aramis.

"Good heavens!" exclaimed Porthos, "what extraordinary precautions for studying theology!"

"Gentlemen," said D'Artagnan, "do not let us lose our time in badinage; let us rather search about, and discover the mercer's wife, who might prove a key to the intrigue."

"What, a woman of such an inferior condition! Do you think it likely, D'Artagnan?" asked Porthos, putting out his lips in derision.

"Have I not told you, gentlemen," said D'Artagnan, "that she is the god-daughter of La Porte, who is the confidential servant of the queen? Perhaps it is her majesty's policy to seek assistance from a source so humble. Lofty heads are visible at a distance, and the cardinal has a good eye."

"Well, then," said Porthos, "make a bargain with the mercer immediately, and let it be a satisfactory one."

"It is unnecessary," said D'Artagnan; "if he should not pay us, we shall be well enough paid from another quarter."

At this moment a noise of hasty steps was heard upon the stairs, the door opened with a crash, and the unhappy mercer rushed into the room in which this council had been held.

"Oh, gentlemen!" he exclaimed, "save me, save me! In the name of Heaven save me! There are four men here who have come to arrest me!"

Porthos and Aramis arose.

"One moment!" cried D'Artagnan, making them a sign to sheath their swords, which they had half drawn, "wait one moment; it is not courage, but prudence, that is necessary here!"

"And yet," said Porthos, "we will not permit——"

"You will let D'Artagnan act," said Athos; "he is the coolest head of the party, and, as for me, I declare that I will obey him. Do what you like, D'Artagnan."

As this speech was uttered, the four guards appeared at the door of the ante-room, but seeing four musketeers standing there, with swords by their sides, they hesitated to advance any further.

"Enter, gentlemen, enter," said D'Artagnan; "you are in my house, and we are all faithful subjects of the king and cardinal."

"Then, gentlemen, you will not oppose any obstacle to the execution of our orders?" demanded he who appeared to be the leader of the party.

"On the contrary, we will assist you, if it becomes necessary."

"What is he saying?" inquired Porthos.

"You are a ninny!" said Athos. "Silence!"

"But you promised to assist me!" whispered the poor mercer.

"We can only assist you by remaining free," hastily replied D'Artagnan, in an undertone; "and if we appear to defend you we shall be arrested also."

"It seems to me, however——" said the poor man.

"Come, gentlemen, come," said D'Artagnan, aloud "I have no motive for defending this person; I saw him to-day for the first time, and on what occasion he will himself tell you. He came to demand his rent—did you not, M. Bonancieux? Answer!"

"It is the simple truth!" cried the mercer; "but the gentleman does not tell you——"

"Be silent about me! about my friends! silent, more especially, about the queen!" whispered D'Artagnan "or you will imprison us all without freeing yourself. Proceed, gentlemen, take away this man!"

So saying, D'Artagnan pushed the poor bewildered mercer into the hands of the guards, at the same time exclaiming:

"You are a rascally fine fellow! You come to demand money of me, a musketeer! To prison with you. Gentlemen, I say again, take him to prison, and keep him under lock and key as long as ever you can; that will give me time to pay."

The officers overwhelmed him with thanks, and carried off their prey.

As they were leaving, D'Artagnan clapped the leader on the shoulder.

"Shall we not drink to each other's health?" said he, filling two glasses with the Beaugency, for which he was indebted to the liberality of M. Bonancieux.

"It will be a great honor to me," replied the leader of the guards, "and I accept the offer with gratitude."

"Here's to you, then, M.—what's your name?"

"Boisrenard!"

"M. Boisrenard!"

"I drink to you, sir; but, in return, what is your name, if you please?"

"D'Artagnan."

"To your health, Monsieur d'Artagnan!"

"And above all," said D'Artagnan, as if carried away by his enthusiasm, "to the health of the king and the cardinal."

The officer might have doubted D'Artagnan's sincerity

had the wine been bad, but it was excellent, and he was satisfied.

"But what devil's own villainy have you done now?" exclaimed Porthos, when the officer had joined his companions, and the four friends found themselves alone. "For shame! Four musketeers allow an unhappy creature who implored their assistance, to be arrested in their very midst! and worse than that, a gentleman to tipple with a bailiff!"

"Porthos," said Aramis, "Athos has already told you that you are a ninny, and I am of his opinion. D'Artagnan, you are a great man, and when you are in M. de Treville's situation, I beg your interest to procure me an abbey."

"Ah! I am quite in the dark!" said Porthos. "Do you, too, approve of what D'Artagnan has done?"

"Most assuredly," said Athos. "I not only approve of it, but I congratulate him."

"And now, gentlemen," said D'Artagnan, without taking the trouble to explain himself to Porthos: "All for one—one for all! this is our motto, is it not?"

"Nevertheless——" said Porthos.

"Stretch out your hand, and swear!" cried Athos and Aramis, in a breath.

Overcome by the example of the others, but muttering in a low tone, Porthos stretched out his hand, and the four friends repeated with one voice the form of words dictated by D'Artagnan.

"All for one, and one for all!"

"That is right. Now retire to your homes," said D'Artagnan, as if he had never been accustomed to anything but to command others. "But," he added, "be watchful; for remember, that from this moment we are at daggers drawn with the cardinal himself."

CHAPTER X.

A HUMAN MOUSETRAP.

THE mousetrap is not a modern invention. As soon as society, by establishing itself, had instituted some kind of police, the police in their turn invented mousetraps.

As our readers are perhaps not familiar with the slang of the Rue de Jerusalem, and as it is, although we have been writers for fifteen years, the first time that we have used the word in this sense, let us explain now what a mousetrap is.

When an individual has been arrested in any house whatever, on suspicion of some crime, his arrest is kept secret; four or five men are placed in ambush in the front room of this house; and who knock are admitted and in their turn locked in and detained; and, in this manner, at the end of three or four days, they hold in custody all the frequenters of the establishment.

This, reader, is a mousetrap! and into a mousetrap was M. Bonancieux's apartment transformed. Whoever applied there was seized and examined by the cardinal's people. But, as there was a private court leading to the first floor which D'Artagnan occupied, his visitors were exempt from this detention. The three musketeers, however, were, in fact, the only visitors he had; and each of these had, by this time, commenced a separate search, but had discovered nothing. Athos had even gone so far as to question M. de Treville—a circumstance which, considering his habitual taciturnity, had greatly surprised his captain. But M. de Treville knew nothing about it, excepting that the last time he had seen either the king, the queen, or the cardinal, the cardinal was very morose, the king very uneasy, and the queen's eyes looked red from either waking or weeping. But this last circumstance had not attracted much notice, as the queen, since her marriage, had both wept and watched frequently.

Furthermore, M. de Treville strongly advised Athos to be active in the king's service, and more particularly in the queen's, and requested him to lay the same injunction on his companions.

As to D'Artagnan, he did not stir from his lodgings. He had converted his room into an observatory. From his own windows he saw everybody who came into the trap; and as he had taken up some boards from the floor, so that nothing but a lath and plaster ceiling separated him from the room below, where the examinations were made, he heard all that passed between the inquisitors and the accused. The interrogatories, which were preceded by a strict search, were almost always in these terms:

"Has Madame Bonancieux sent anything by you for her husband or any other person?"

"Has M. Bonancieux intrusted you with anything for his wife, or any one else?"

"Has either of them intrusted you with any verbal communication?"

"If they knew anything they would not put such questions," said D'Artagnan to himself. "But what are they trying to discover,—whether the Duke of Buckingham is in Paris at present, and if he has not had, or is not about to have, an interview with the queen?"

D'Artagnan stopped at this idea, which, after all that he had heard, was not without probability. In the meantime, however, both the mousetrap and the vigilance of D'Artagnan remained in activity.

As it was striking nine on the evening of the day after poor Bonancieux's arrest, and just as Athos had left D'Artagnan to go to M. de Treville's, whilst Planchet, who had not made the bed, was about to do so, there was a knocking at the street door, which was immediately opened and shut again; it was another mouse in the trap.

D'Artagnan rushed toward the unboarded part of his floor, and laid himself down to listen. In a short time cries were heard, and then groans, which they endeavored to stifle.

There was no thought of examination.

"The devil!" said D'Artagnan to himself; "it seem to me to be a woman; they are searching her, and sh resists; the wretches are using violence."

In spite of his prudence, D'Artagnan had some troub to restrain himself from interfering in the scene whic was being enacted underneath.

"I tell you, gentlemen, that I am the mistress of th house; I am Madame Bonancieux. I tell you that I a a servant of the queen's!" exclaimed the unfortuna woman.

"Madame Bonancieux!" murmured D'Artagnan "have I been so fortunate as to find her whom every body is looking for?"

"You are the very person we were waiting for, replied the officers.

The voice came more and more stifled. Violent strug gling made the wainscot rattle. The victim was offe ing all the resistance one woman can offer against fou men.

"Forgive me, gentlemen, by——" murmured th voice, which now uttered only inarticulate sounds.

"They have gagged her! They are going to drag he away," ejaculated D'Artagnan, raising himself with leap. "My sword! Right! it is by my side! Plan chet!"

"Sir."

"Run and seek Athos, Porthos, and Aramis. One o the three must be at home—perhaps all may have re turned. Tell them to arm themselves and hasten here Ah! now I remember, Athos is with M. de Treville."

"But where are you going, sir? Where are yo going?"

"I shall get down through the window," said D'Ar tagnan, "that I may be there sooner. Do you replac the boards, sweep the floor, go out by the door, an hasten whither I have told you."

"Oh! sir, you will kill yourself!" cried Planchet.

"Hold your tongue, idiot!" cried D'Artagnan.

Then, grasping the window-sill, he dropped from the first story, which, fortunately, was not high, without suffering even a scratch. He then went immediately and knocked at the door, muttering:

"I am going in my turn to be caught in the mouse-trap; but woe betide the cats who shall deal with such a mouse!"

Scarcely had the knocker sounded beneath the young man's hand ere the tumult ceased, and footsteps approached. The door was opened, and D'Artagnan, armed with his naked sword, sprang into the apartment of M. Bonancieux, the door of which, doubtless moved by a spring, shut of itself behind him.

Then might those who yet inhabited the unlucky house of M. Bonancieux, and the nearest neighbors, hear fierce outcries, stampings, and the clashings of swords and the continual crash of breaking furniture. After a moment more, those who had looked from their windows to learn the cause of this surprising noise, might see the door open, and four men clothed in black not merely make their exit, but fly, like frightened crows, leaving on the ground and at the corners of the house, their feathers and wings—that is to say, the rags of their coats and the scraps of their cloaks.

D'Artagnan had come off victorious, without much difficulty, it must be confessed; for only one of the officers was armed, and he had defended himself only for appearance' sake. It is quite true that the other three had endeavored to knock down the young man with chairs, stools, and crockery, but a scratch or two apiece from the Gascon's sword had scared them. Ten minutes sufficed for their defeat, and D'Artagnan remained master of the field of battle.

The neighbors, who had opened their windows with the indifference habitual to the inhabitants of Paris at that season of perpetual disturbances and riots, closed them again when they saw the four men escape; their instinct told them all was over for the time. Besides, it was getting late, and then, as well as now, people

went to bed early in the neighborhood of the Luxembourg.

When D'Artagnan was left alone with Madame Bonacieux, he turned toward her. The poor woman was lying in an easy chair, almost senseless. D'Artagnan overlooked her with a rapid glance.

She was a charming woman, about twenty-five or twenty-six years of age; with blue eyes, a nose slightly turned up, beautiful teeth, and a complexion of softly mingling pink and white. Here, however, ended the charms which might have confounded her with a lady of high birth. Her hands were well, but not delicately formed; and her feet did not indicate a woman of quality. Fortunately D'Artagnan had not yet come to observe these particulars.

Whilst D'Artagnan was gazing at Madame Bonancieux and had got, as we have said, to her feet, he saw on the ground a fine cambric handkerchief, which, according to his old habit, he picked up; and at the corner of it discovered the same cipher that he had seen on the handkerchief which had almost cost him a fight to the death with Aramis. Since that time D'Artagnan had mistrusted all coroneted handkerchiefs; and he now put that which he had picked up into Madame Bonancieux's pocket without saying a word.

At that moment Madame Bonancieux recovered her senses. She opened her eyes, looked around her in affright, saw that the room was empty, and that she was alone with her deliverer. She immediately held out her hands to him with a smile; and Madame Bonancieux had the most charming smile in the world.

"Ah! sir," said she, "it is you who have saved me; allow me to thank you!"

"Madame," replied D'Artagnan, "I have only done what every gentleman would have done in my situation. You owe me no thanks."

"Yes, yes, sir, I do; and I hope to prove to you that you have not saved one who is ungrateful. But what did these men, whom I at first took for robbers;

want with me? and why is not M. Bonancieux here?"

"Madame, these men are far more dangerous than any robbers—for they are agents of the cardinal; and as for your husband, M. Bonancieux, he is not here because he was taken yesterday to the Bastille."

"My husband in the Bastile!" cried Madame Bonancieux; "oh, my God! what has he been doing, poor dear man! Why, he is innocence itself!"

And something like a smile skimmed over the still frightened countenance of the young wife.

"As to what he has been doing, madame," said D'Artagnan, "I believe that his only crime consists in having at the same time the happiness and the misfortune of being your husband."

"Then, sir, you know the cause?"

"I know that you were carried off, madame."

"But by whom—do you know that? Oh, if you do, pray tell me!"

"By a man about forty or forty-five years of age, with dark hair, a brown complexion, and a scar on the left temple."

"That is true, that is true; but his name?"

"Ah! his name—that is just what I do not know."

"And did my husband know that I had been carried off?"

"He had been informed of it by a letter sent him by your abductor himself."

"And does he suspect," demanded Madame Bonancieux, with some confusion, "the cause of this abduction?"

"He attributed it, I believe, to some political cause."

"At first I doubted whether it was so, but now I think as he does; and so my dear M. Bonancieux did not lose faith in me for a single instant?"

"So far from that, madame, he was too proud of your prudence and your love."

A second smile, almost imperceptible, embellished the rosy lips of the beautiful young woman.

"But," continued D'Artagnan, "how did you mak your escape?"

"I profited by a moment in which I was left alone and, as I this morning learned the cause of my abduc tion, by the aid of my sheets I climbed down from m window, and hurried here, where I expected to find m husband."

"To place yourself under his protection?"

"Oh, no! the poor dear man! I knew that he wa unable to defend me; but, as he might be of som service to us, I wished to put him on his guard."

"Against what?"

"Alas! that is not my secret; and I dare not tell i to you."

"Besides," said D'Artagnan—"pardon me, madame if, protector as I am, I remind you of prudence—besides I think we are scarcely in a situation suitable to confi dential conversation. The men whom I have put t flight will return with aid, and if they find us here, w shall both be lost. I have sent to summon three of m friends, but it is uncertain whether they may be foun at home!"

"Yes, yes! you are right," said Madame Bonancieux in alarm; "let us fly; let us escape!"

And seizing D'Artagnan by his arm, she eagerly drev him along.

"But whither shall we fly? how shall we escape? said D'Artagnan.

"Let us go away from this place first, and then w will consider what to do."

Without taking the trouble to shut the door, the tw young people hastily passed down the Rue des Fos soyeurs, crossed the Rue des Fossés Monsieur le Prince and did not stop until they reached the Place de St Sulpice.

"And now what are we to do?" inquired D'Artagnan "and whither do you wish me to conduct you?"

"I confess that I scarcely know how to answer you," said Madame Bonancieux; "I had intended, throug

ny husband, to intimate my escape to M. de la Porte, o that the latter might tell us exactly what has hap- ened at the Louvre within the last three days, and whether there would be any danger in my appearing here."

" But I," said D'Artagnan, " can go and inform M. de a Porte."

" Undoubtedly ; but there is a difficulty : M. Bonan- ieux is known at the Louvre, and would be allowed o enter ; whilst you, not being known, would not be dmitted."

" Ah, bah ! " said D'Artagnan ; " there is doubtless a orter at some wicket at the Louvre who is devoted to ou, and who, thanks to some countersign——"

Madame Bonancieux looked earnestly at the young nan.

" And if I trusted you with this watchword," said he, " would you undertake to forget it as soon as you ad made use of it ? "

" On my word of honor ! on the faith of a gentle- nan ! " said D'Artagnan, with an accent of truth which never can mislead.

" Well, I believe you ! You look like a man of honor, nd your fortune, perhaps, may depend on your devotion."

" I will perform without any promises, and conscien- iously, whatever I can to serve the king, and to be of ssistance to the queen," said D'Artagnan ; " use me, herefore, as a friend ! "

" But where will you put me in the meantime ? "

" Have you no acquaintance, where M. de la Porte can ome for you ? "

" No, I would rather not trust to any one ! "

" Wait," said D'Artagnan ; " we are now just by thos's door ; yes, that must be the way ! "

" And who is Athos ? "

" A friend of mine."

" But if he is at home he will see me."

" He is not there, and I will take away the key when have locked you into his room."

"Suppose he should return?"

"He will not return; besides, if he should, he will b told that I have brought a lady here, and that she i now in his room."

"But don't you see this will compromise me sadly?"

"Why should you care? No one knows you; be sides, we are not in a position to be nice about trifles."

"Well, let us go to your friend's house, then; wher does he live?"

"In the Rue Ferou—two steps from here."

"Come, then."

And the two proceeded on their way. As D'Artagna had foreseen, Athos was not at home; so taking th key, which they were in the habit of giving to him as friend of the musketeers, he ascended the stairs, an introduced Madame Bonancieux into the little roor which we have already described.

"You are now at home," said he; "lock the doo inside, and do not open it to any one, unless you hea three knocks, thus!" and he gave three knocks—tw quick and strong, and, after a short interval, one gentl knock.

"That will do," said Madame Bonancieux; "and no let me give you your instructions."

"I am all attention!"

"Present yourself at the small gate of the Louvre, o the side of the Rue de l'Echelle, and ask for Germain."

"Very well; and what then?"

"He will ask you what you want; you must answe by these words: 'Tours and Brussels,' and he will im mediately attend to your commands."

"And what shall I tell him to do?"

"To go and find M. de la Porte, the queen's *vale de-chambre.*"

"And when M. de la Porte has come?"

"You will send him to me."

"Very well. But when, where, and how shall I se you again?"

"Do you really feel anxious to see me again?"

"Certainly."

"Well, then, leave that to me, and set your mind at rest."

"I rely upon your word."

"You may depend upon me."

D'Artagnan took leave of Madame Bonancieux with the most admiring gaze that he could concentrate upon her pretty little person, and whilst he was descending the stairs, he heard the door behind him doubly locked. In a run he reached the Louvre; and as he stood at the small door in the Rue de l'Echelle, it struck ten: so that all the events we have just related had transpired within half an hour.

Everything happened just as Madame Bonancieux had predicted. Germain heard the watchword with a bow; in ten minutes De la Porte was in the porter's lodge, and in two words D'Artagnan told him what had occurred, and where Madame Bonancieux was to be found. La Porte made himself certain of the address by having it thrice repeated, and then hastened away. But he had scarcely taken ten steps before he returned.

"Young man," said he, "let me give you a bit of good advice."

"What is it?"

"You may possibly get into some trouble on account of this affair."

"Do you think so?"

"I do! Have you any particular friend *whose clock is slow?*"

"Well, what then?"

"Go and pay him a visit, that he may be able to bear witness that you were in his company at half-past nine. In law, this is what is called an *alibi*."

D'Artagnan thought the advice prudent. He therefore took to his heels and reached M. de Treville's; but instead of entering the drawing-room with the rest of the company, he asked to be admitted into his cabinet, and as he was one of the habitual frequenters of the hotel, no objection was made to this; and M. de Treville

was soon informed that the young countryman, having something of importance to communicate, solicited a private interview.

M. de Treville was there in five minutes, and asked D'Artagnan what he could do for him, and what had brought him there at such a late hour.

"Forgive me, sir," said D'Artagnan (who had taken advantage of the moment he was left alone to put the clock back three-quarters of an hour), "but I thought as it was only twenty-five minutes past nine, it was not yet too late to present myself before you."

"Twenty-five minutes past nine!" exclaimed M. de Treville, looking at the clock; "it is impossible!"

"Look for yourself, sir," said D'Artagnan.

"You are right," said M. de Treville; "I thought it was later. But let me hear what it is you want with me."

Then D'Artagnan entered into a long story about the queen: confessing all the fears that he entertained upon her majesty's account, and recounting all that he had heard about the cardinal's designs against Buckingham; yet communicating his intelligence with a degree of tranquillity and consistency by which M. de Treville was the more readily duped, inasmuch as he had himself, as we have already said, remarked that something fresh was stirring between the cardinal, the king, and the queen.

Just as the clock was striking ten, D'Artagnan arose and took leave of M. de Treville, who, after thanking him for the information, and impressing on him every increased vigilance in the service of the king and the queen, returned to his salon.

But D'Artagnan remembered at the bottom of the stairs, that he had left his cane behind; he therefore hastened up again, re-entered the cabinet, and with one touch of his finger put the clock to the right time, that it might not be seen the next day to have been wrong; then, satisfied that he had an unimpeachable witness to substantiate his *alibi*, the young Gascon

gain descended the stairs, and soon found himself in he street.

CHAPTER XI.

THE KNOT STILL MORE ENTANGLED.

WHEN his visit to M. de Treville was ended, D'Artagnan ook, in a thoughtful mood, a roundabout route home.

But what were the meditations which thus led him out f his way, contemplating, with successive sigh and mile, the stars that glittered in the sky?

Alas! he was intent on Madame Bonancieux. To an mbryo musketeer, the charms of that young person aised her almost into an ideal. Pretty, mysterious, and nitiated into all the mysteries of the court, which reected so much charming seriousness over her seductive eatures, she was supposed, also, to be not wholly unmpassioned, which is an irresistible attraction to novices n matters of the heart. He felt, moreover, that he had elivered her from the hands of miscreants who wished o maltreat her; and this important service had preossessed her with a sentiment of gratitude toward him, hich might easily be made to take a character of nderness.

So rapidly do our dreams travel on imagination's ings, that D'Artagnan already saw himself accosted y some messenger from Madame Bonancieux, handing o him an appointment for an interview, and a jewel r a chain of gold. We have already intimated that the oung cavaliers were not then ashamed of accepting resents from their kings; and we may add that they ere but little more particular in respect to their misresses, and that these latter often conferred upon them me precious and endearing memento, as though enleavoring to conceal the instability of their sentiments y the solidity of their gifts.

Men did not then blush at owing their advancement

to women. Those who were only beautiful gave thei beauty; and thence, doubtless, came the saying, tha the most beautiful girl in the world can give only tha which she has. Those who were rich gave, besides, portion of their money; and we might refer to man amongst the heroes of that age of gallantry who woul neither have won their spurs at first, nor their battle afterward, but for the better or worse furnished purs which some fine lady had suspended at their saddle-bow

Now D'Artagnan had really nothing of his own. Hi provincial hesitation, that superficial varnish, tha ephemeral bloom, had evaporated under the influence o the unorthodox advice which the three musketeers ha given to their friend. According to the curious custom of the time, he had come to look upon himself as bein just as much engaged in a campaign whilst he was a Paris as though he had been in Flanders. There h would have been opposed to Spaniards, here it was t the fair sex; yet, in either case, there was an enem to overcome and contributions to be raised.

But let us not disguise the fact that the young Gasco was at present influenced by a nobler and more disi terested feeling. The mercer had confessed to him tha he was rich, and it was easy to infer that, with a simpleto like Bonancieux, the wife would be the keeper of th purse. But nothing of this kind contributed to tha sentiment which the sight of Madame Bonancieux i spired, and interest had been almost disregarded in th dawning love which had arisen from their intervie We say almost—for the assurance that a young, lovel charming, and witty woman is rich also, has no tenden to diminish, but rather to quicken this growth of sen ment. In easy circumstances there are a crowd aristocratic cares and caprices which accord well wi beauty. A white and fine stocking, a silken dress, a sc fur tippet, a pretty little shoe, a becoming ribbon, not make a plain woman pretty, but they make a pret woman irresistible; whilst her hands, moreover, a sure to be the gainers by wealth; for the hands—

omen, especially—must remain idle if they are to main handsome.

Now, as the reader very well knows—for we have made secret of the state of his finances—D'Artagnan was t a man of fortune. It is true that he quite expected become so at some future time; but the date which had himself fixed on for that happy transformation as as yet very distant. In the meantime what sorrow ould it be to see the woman one idolizes sighing for the ousand trifles in which so much of the happiness of e sex consists, and to be unable to procure them for r! But when the lady is rich, although the lover be or, the gifts which he cannot present she can provide r herself; and then, although it may most frequently with the husband's money that these enjoyments are tained, it is not always to him that the gratitude is own.

Thus disposed to become the most passionate of adrers, D'Artagnan had not ceased to be a devoted end. In the midst of his tender feelings toward the rcer's wife he was not forgetful of other claims. The tty Madame Bonancieux was the very woman to ke on an excursion to the plain of Saint Denis, or the r at Saint Germain, in company with Athos, Porthos, d Aramis, to whom he would be so proud to show his arming conquest. And then, as D'Artagnan had happened to remark of late, after a long walk one gets ngry; and they would have some of those pleasant tle dinners, during which the silent touch of a hand of a foot multiplies the number whilst it increases e intensity of our enjoyments. Finally, in moments emergency, in great extremities, might it not be his ppiness to be the savior of his friends?

But what of M. Bonancieux, whom D'Artagnan had ven over to the keeping of the officers; disowning him oud, whilst in a whisper he assured him of his care? e must confess to our readers, that D'Artagnan had t thought of him at all; or if he did think of him, was merely to say to himself, that he was very well

where he was, wherever that might be. Love is th most selfish of all human passions.

Nevertheless, let our readers take comfort; thoug D'Artagnan forgets his landlord, or pretends to forg him under the excuse of not knowing where he had bee taken, we have not forgotten him, and do know whe he is. But, for the present, let us act like the amorou Gascon. As for the worthy mercer, we will return him by and by.

D'Artagnan, whilst meditating on his future love, ar conversing with the night, and smiling at the star proceeded along the Rue de Chasse Midi, as it was the called. Being in Aramis's neighborhood, he thought h might as well pay him a visit, to explain why he ha sent Planchet with the invitation to hasten to th mousetrap.

If Planchet had found Aramis at home, he had probab gone back to the Rue des Fossoyeurs, and, finding noboc there but his other two friends, perhaps they would a have been in ignorance of what the summons mean This dilemma needed some explanation; or, at least, reflected D'Artagnan aloud.

But, in his inner soul, he thought that this call wou give him an opportunity of talking of the pretty Madam Bonancieux, with whom his mind, if not his heart, w already occupied. It is not in regard to a first love th we must expect discretion. The joy with which our fir passion is attended is so exuberant that it must ove flow, or it would suffocate us.

For the last two hours Paris had been dark and near deserted. Eleven o'clock was striking from all th clocks of the Faubourg St. Germain; the weather w very mild, and D'Artagnan was passing down a sma street situated on the ground where the Rue d'Ass now stands, where the air was redolent of perfumes th were borne on the wind along the Rue de Vaugiraud fro unseen flowers that the evening dews and gentle bree refreshed. Afar off, though deadened by substanti shutters, was heard the revelry of the wine-shops, whi

were scattered over the plain. Having reached the end of the street, D'Artagnan turned to the left. The house where Aramis lived was situated between the Rue Cassette and the Rue Servandoni.

D'Artagnan had already passed by the Rue Cassette and could just perceive the door of his friend's house, embosomed amidst sycamores and clematis, when he saw something like a shadow which came out of the Rue Servandoni. This something was enveloped in a cloak, and D'Artagnan at first thought it was a man ; but from the smallness of its size, the irresolution of its manner, and its impeded step, he soon became convinced that it must be a woman. And moreover, this woman, as though she was uncertain of the house she sought for, lifted up her eyes to examine, stopped, turned back, and then retraced her steps again. D'Artagnan was confounded.

" Suppose I go and proffer my services," thought he. " By her manner it is evident that she is young, and very likely she is pretty. Oh, yes ! But then, a woman who runs about the streets at this hour seldom goes out except to meet her lover. Plague, if I should interrupt an appointment, it would be but a bad kind of introduction."

But the young woman still came forward, counting the windows and the houses. This was not, indeed, a long or difficult operation. There were but three hotels in that part of the street, and but two windows looking upon the thoroughfare, of which one was that of a pavilion parallel to that of Aramis, and the other that of Aramis himself.

" By Jove ! " said D'Artagnan to himself, as he suddenly remembered the theologian's niece ; " by Jove ! it would be droll if this wandering dove is looking for my friend's house. But, upon my soul, it seems very like it. Ah, my dear Aramis, for this once I will be satisfied about you."

Making himself as small as possible, D'Artagnan concealed himself in the most obscure part of the street, near a block of stone in the shadow of a recess.

The young woman continued to advance, for, besides the lightness of her step, which had betrayed her, a slight small cough also denoted a gentle voice. D'Artagnan concluded that the cough was a signal.

Meanwhile, whether this cough had already been answered by some corresponding signal that settled the uncertainties of her nocturnal search, or whether, without any such external aid, she perceived that she had found her journey's end, the lady advanced resolutely, and knocked three times, at equal intervals, with bent finger, on the shutter of Aramis's window.

"It is really at Aramis's house," muttered D'Artagnan. "Ah, M. Hypocrite, I catch you studying theology!"

Scarcely had the three blows been struck, before the inner casement opened, and a light appeared.

"Ah, ah!" said the listener—"not at the door, but the window—the visit was expected. Come, the shutter will be opened presently, and the lady will get in by escalade. Good!"

But, to his great astonishment, the shutter continued closed; and, what was more, the light, which had flashed for an instant, disappeared, and all became dark again.

D'Artagnan thought this could not last, and continued to watch with all his eyes and ears. He was right; in a few seconds two knocks were heard from the inside, and when the young woman answered by one knock, the shutter opened.

It may be judged whether D'Artagnan did not look and listen eagerly.

Unfortunately, the light had been removed into another room; but the eyes of the young man were accustomed to the darkness. Besides, it is said that the eyes of Gascons, like those of cats, have the faculty of seeing in the dark.

D'Artagnan was able, therefore, to see the young woman take from her pocket something white, which she unfolded quickly, and which took the form of a pocket handkerchief, and she then drew the attention of the

person she addressed to the corner of the object she unfolded.

This reminded D'Artagnan of the handkerchief he had found at the feet of Madame Bonancieux, which, in its turn, recalled to his recollection the one he had seen under the foot of Aramis.

What the deuce, then, could *this* handkerchief mean?

Situated as he was, D'Artagnan could not see the countenance of Aramis—we say Aramis, because the young man had no doubt it was his friend who was confabulating from the inside with the lady on the outside. His curiosity, therefore, overcame his prudence, and profiting by the earnest attention which the sight of the handkerchief excited in the two persons whom we have described, he left his place of concealment, and quick as lightning, yet with noiseless step, placed himself near a corner of the wall, from which his eye could completely overlook the inside of Aramis's apartment. On reaching this spot, he was scarcely able to restrain an exclamation of surprise. It was not Aramis who was conferring with the midnight visitor, but a woman. D'Artagnan could just discern enough to recognize the form of her clothes, but failed to distinguish the features. At that moment the woman in the room drew a handkerchief from her own pocket, and exchanged it for the one which had been held out to her. A few words were then exchanged between them, the shutter was closed, and the woman in the street returned, and, lowering the hood of her cloak, passed within four paces of D'Artagnan. But the precaution had been taken too late; he had recognized Madame Bonancieux!

Madame Bonancieux! The suspicion had already crossed his mind when he saw her take the handkerchief from her pocket; but what probability was there that Madame Bonancieux, who had sent for M. de la Porte, in order that he might conduct her to the Louvre, should be running about the streets of Paris at half-past eleven at night, at the risk of being carried off a second time? It must unquestionably be on some important

affair; and what affair is of importance to a woman of twenty-five, save love?

But was it on her own account, or that of a second person, that she exposed herself to this risk? This was the inward question of the young man, whom the demon of jealousy was now tormenting, as though he had been an acknowledged lover. To satisfy himself as to where Madame Bonancieux was going, there was, in fact, one very simple way, which was to follow her. So simple, indeed, did this course appear, that D'Artagnan adopted it naturally, and, as it were, by instinct.

But, at the sight of the young man, who moved from the wall, like a statue from its niche, and at the sound of his steps behind her, Madame Bonancieux uttered a faint scream and fled.

D'Artagnan ran after her. It was no great difficulty for him to catch a woman encumbered by a large cloak. He overtook her, in fact, before she had gone a third of the length of the street into which she had entered. The poor woman was exhausted, not by fatigue, but terror; and when D'Artagnan put his hand upon her shoulder, she sank upon one knee, exclaiming in a suffocating voice:

"Kill me, if you choose, but you shall learn nothing!"

D'Artagnan raised her up by placing his arm round her waist, but perceiving by her weight that she was upon the point of fainting, he hastened to encourage her by protestations of devotion. These expressions were of no avail to Madame Bonancieux, for they may easily be made with the most mischievous intentions in the world; but the voice was everything. The young woman thought she recognized the voice; she opened her eyes, threw one glance upon the man who had so frightened her, and seeing that it was D'Artagnan, gave utterance to a cry of joy.

"Oh, it is you, it is you!" said she. "God be thanked!"

"Yes, it is I," said D'Artagnan, "whom God has sent to watch over you."

"And was it with this intent that you followed me?" asked the young woman, with a smile full of coquetry, for all her fears had vanished, and her love of raillery resumed its natural ascendancy, on the instant that she recognized a friend in one she had so greatly dreaded as a foe.

"No," replied D'Artagnan. "No, I confess that it was chance which put me on your track. I saw a woman knocking at the window of one of my friends."

"One of your friends?" interrupted Madame Bonancieux.

"Yes, certainly! Aramis is one of my best friends."

"Aramis! who is he?"

"Come, now, have you the effrontery to tell me that you do not know Aramis?"

"It is the first time I ever heard his name."

"Then it is the first time that you have visited this house?"

"Yes, indeed!"

"And you did not know that it was inhabited by a young man?"

"No."

"By a musketeer?"

"Not in the least, I assure you."

"Then it was not Monsieur Aramis that you came to look for?"

"Most assuredly not! Besides, you must have plainly seen that the person with whom I talked was a woman."

"That is true; but then, this woman must be one of Aramis's friends."

"I know nothing about that."

"Why, she lodges at his house."

"I have nothing to do with that."

"But who is she?"

"Oh! that is not my secret."

"My dear Madame Bonancieux, you are very charming, but you are at the same time the most mysterious creature."

"Do I lose anything by that?"

"It makes you, on the contrary, all the more enchanting!"

"As that is the case, give me your arm."

"With great pleasure. And what then?"

"Now take care of me."

"Where to?"

"Where I am going."

"But where may that be?"

"You will see, since you must leave me at the door."

"May I wait for you?"

"It would be useless."

"Then you will return alone?"

"Perhaps so—perhaps not."

"But the person who will accompany you afterwards—will it be a man or a woman?"

"I do not know yet."

"But I will find out."

"How?"

"I will wait to see you come out."

"In that case, good-bye!"

"But why so?"

"I do not want you!"

"But you claimed my protection."

"I claimed the assistance of a gentleman, and not the surveillance of a policeman!"

"The expression is a little harsh."

"What do you call gentlemen who follow ladies in spite of their unwillingness?"

"Indiscreet!"

"The term is too mild!"

"Come, madame, I see that one must do just as you please."

"Why deprive yourself of the merit of doing it at once?"

"Is there none in my repentance?"

"But *do* you repent?"

"I don't know, myself. But I do know that I promise

to do just what you wish, if you will let me accompany you where you are going."

"And you will leave me afterwards?"

"Yes."

"Without watching my coming out?"

"Certainly."

"On your word of honor?"

"On the word of a gentleman!"

"Then take my arm, and let us go on."

D'Artagnan offered his arm, which Madame Bonancieux, half laughing and half trembling, accepted, and they reached the top of the Rue de la Harpe; but the young woman appeared to hesitate there, as she had done before in the Rue Vaugiraud. Nevertheless, by certain marks, she appeared to recognize a door which she approached.

"Now, sir," said she, "it is here that my business calls me. I return a thousand thanks for your good company, which has saved me from all the dangers to which I should have been exposed alone; but the time has now come for you to keep your word. You must leave me here."

"And shall you be exposed to no danger in returning?"

"I shall only have to fear robbers."

"Is that nothing?"

"What could they take from me? I have not a farthing in my possession!"

"You forget that beautiful embroidered handkerchief, with the arms on it."

"Which?"

"That which I found at your feet, and replaced in your pocket."

"Hold your tongue! hold your unlucky tongue! Do you wish to ruin me?"

"You see now that there is still some danger, since one word makes you tremble, and you confess that if this word was heard you would be ruined. Come, now, madame," continued D'Artagnan, seizing her hand, "be more generous; put some confidence in me; have

you not read in my eyes that my heart is full of sympathy and devotion ? "

" Yes," said Madame Bonancieux ; " do but ask me for my own secrets, and I will trust you with them all but those of others are a different nature."

" Very well ! " replied D'Artagnan ; " then I will find them out. Since those secrets have an influence on your life, it is necessary that they should become mine also."

" Shun them above all things ! " exclaimed the young woman, in a tone of seriousness, which made D'Artagnan shudder involuntarily. " Oh ! do not interfere in anything that concerns me ; do not seek to aid me in any of my undertakings ; avoid them, I beseech you, in the name of all the service you have rendered me, and which I never shall forget whilst my life lasts ! Let me advise you, rather, to think of me no more ; let my existence be obliterated ever from your mind ; let me be to you as though you had never chanced to see me."

" Would you like Aramis to do the same, madame ? " asked D'Artagnan, angrily.

" This makes the second or third time that you have mentioned that name, sir, although I have already told you that I do not know him."

" You do not know the man at whose window-shutters you went to knock ? Come, madame, you must think me strangely credulous ! "

" Confess that it is to keep me talking here that you have invented this tale and created this person."

" I invent nothing, madame ; I have created no one. I am telling the exact truth."

" And you say that one of your friends lives in that house ? "

" I say it, and I repeat it for the third time—that house is inhabited by a friend of mine, and that friend is Aramis."

" All this will be cleared up by and by," murmured the young woman ; " and now, sir, be silent."

" If you could see into my heart," said D'Artagnan, " you would discover so much curiosity that you would

have pity on me; and so much love that you would directly satisfy my curiosity. You ought not to distrust those who love you."

"You speak very quickly of love, sir," said the young woman, shaking her head.

"It is because love has come quickly on me, and for the first time; I am not yet twenty years of age."

The young woman stole a glance at him.

"Listen," continued D'Artagnan; "I am already on the track; three months ago I came near fighting a duel with Aramis on account of a handkerchief like that which you showed the lady who was at his house; it was on account of a handkerchief marked in the same manner, I am positive."

"Sir," said the young woman, "you really annoy me with these questions."

"But you, madame, prudent as you are, suppose you were arrested with this handkerchief upon you, and the handkerchief was seized, would you not be compromised?"

"How so? Are not the initials my own—C. B.—Constance Bonancieux?"

"Or, Camille de Bois Tracy."

"Hold your tongue, sir! hold your tongue! Oh! since the dangers which I run do not deter you, think of those you may yourself incur."

"I?"

"Yes, you. There is danger of imprisonment and death in knowing me."

"Then I will never leave you!"

"Sir," said the young woman, in a tone of supplication, clasping her hands as she spoke, "in the name of Heaven, by the honor of a soldier, by the courtesy of a gentleman, I implore you to leave me. See! it is now striking twelve, the very hour at which I am expected."

"Madame," said the young man, bowing, "I can refuse no favor solicited in such terms. Be content; I leave you."

"But you will not follow—will not watch me?"

"No, I shall return home immediately."

"Ah! I was convinced that you were an honorabl man!" exclaimed Madame Bonancieux, offering one o her hands to him, as she placed the other on the knocke of a small door, which was well-nigh hidden in the wall.

D'Artagnan seized the hand which was offered to him and kissed it eagerly

"Alas!" exclaimed D'Artagnan, with that unpolishe simplicity which women sometimes prefer to all th delicacies of politeness, because it brings to light th depths of thought and proves that feeling is more power ful than reason; "I wish I had never seen you!"

"Well," said Madame Bonancieux, in a tone almos caressing, and grasping the hand that held hers, "well I will not say the same as you do; that which is los to-day may not be lost forever. Who knows whether when I am freed from my present embarrassments, may not satisfy your curiosity?"

"And do you make the same promise to my love? asked the overjoyed D'Artagnan.

"Oh! I dare give no promises in that respect. I must depend upon the sentiments with which you ma inspire me."

"But, at present, madame?"

"At present, sir, I have not got beyond gratitude."

"Alas! you are too charming, and merely take ad vantage of my love."

"No; I make use of your generosity, that is all But, believe me, with some people nothing can be wholly lost."

"You make me the happiest of men. Oh, do no forget this evening, and this promise!"

"Be assured I will remember everything, at the righ time and place. But now go; in Heaven's name! was expected at midnight, and am behind my time."

"By five minutes."

"But, under certain circumstances, five minutes ar five ages."

"Yes! when one loves."

"Well, who has told you that I have not to deal with me in love?"

"It is a man who expects you?" cried D'Artagnan; "a man!"

"There, now, the discussion is about to be renewed," cried Madame Bonancieux, with a half smile, which was not altogether exempt from impatience.

"No! I am going. I believe you; I wish to claim all the merit of my devotion, even if I am a fool for it! Adieu, madame, adieu!"

Then, as though he felt himself too weak to relinquish the fair hand he held, he hastily ran off, whilst Madame Bonancieux rapped three times at the door, slowly and regularly, as she had before done at the window-shutter. At the corner of the street the musketeer turned, but the door had been opened and closed again, and the mercer's pretty wife had disappeared.

D'Artagnan proceeded on his way. He had promised Madame Bonancieux not to watch her; and, had his life depended on a knowledge of the place that she was going to, or the person who went with her, he would still have gone home, as he had promised. In five minutes he was in the Rue des Fossoyeurs.

"Poor Athos," said he, "he will not understand all this. He will have fallen asleep waiting for me, or he will have returned home, and will have learned that there has been a woman there. A woman in *his* house! After all," continued D'Artagnan, "there certainly was one at Aramis's! All this is very strange, and I shall be extremely curious to know how it will end."

"Badly, sir, badly," replied a voice which the young man recognized as that of Planchet, for, in soliloquizing aloud, in the manner of persons who are deeply occupied, he had entered the passage, at the bottom of which was his own staircase.

"How badly! what are you saying, you fool?" said D'Artagnan, "and what has happened?"

"All sorts of misfortunes."

"What are they?"

"In the first place, M. Athos is arrested."

"Arrested! Athos arrested! and what for?"

"He was found in your lodgings, and they mistook him for you."

"And by whom has he been arrested?"

"By the guard which was brought by the black fellows whom you put to flight."

"Why did he not give his name? Why not say that he knew nothing about this affair?"

"He was very careful not to do that, sir; on the contrary, he came near me, and said: 'Thy master wants his liberty just now, and I do not, since he knows all and I know nothing. They will believe him to be in custody, and that will give him time. In three days I will declare who I am, and they will be obliged to set me free.'"

"Brave Athos! noble heart!" muttered D'Artagnan. "I recognize him well in that! And what did the officers do?"

"Four of them took him either to the Bastile or to Fort l'Evêque, and two remained with the black men rummaging everywhere, and carrying away all your papers. The other two mounted guard at the door whilst all this was doing, and at last they went away, leaving the house empty and the door open."

"And Porthos and Aramis?"

"I could not find them, nor have they called here."

"But they may come at any moment, for you left word that I was waiting for them?"

"Yes, sir."

"Well, then, do not stir from this spot. If they should come, tell them what has happened, and that they must wait for me at the Pineapple Tavern. There might be some danger here—the house may be watched. I will run to M. de Treville's to tell him all this, and then will rejoin them there."

"Very well, sir," said Planchet.

"But you will remain? you will not be afraid?" said D'Artagnan, turning back a step to encourage his lackey.

"Be easy, sir," said Planchet; "you do not know me yet. I am brave when I choose to set about it. The great thing is to get me in the humor. Besides, I am from Picardy."

"Then it is all settled," said D'Artagnan; "you will rather die than desert your post?"

"Yes, sir; and there is nothing that I will not do to prove my attachment to you."

"Good!" said D'Artagnan to himself; "it is plain that the method I have followed with this lad was decidedly the proper one. I will adopt it henceforth on every occasion."

And as fast as his legs, which were already somewhat fatigued, could carry him, he ran toward the Rue du Colombier.

M. de Treville was not at home. His company was on guard at the Louvre, and he was at the Louvre in command.

It was necessary, however, to see M. de Treville. It was important that he should know what had happened. D'Artagnan determined, therefore, to endeavor to obtain an entrance at the Louvre. His uniform, as one of M. des Essarts's guards, ought to be a passport for admission.

He therefore went down to the Rue des Petits-Augustins, and along the Quai, to reach the Pont Neuf. He had half a mind to cross the ferry; but on reaching the side of the river he mechanically put his hand into his pocket and found that he had not enough to pay the ferryman.

When he reached the top of the Rue Guénégaud, he saw two persons, whose appearance struck him, coming out of the Rue Dauphine. There was a man and a woman. The woman was of a figure very like that of Madame Bonancieux, and the man so much resembled Aramis that he might be mistaken for him. Besides, the woman had on the black mantle which D'Artagnan still seemed to see delineated on the shutter in the Rue Vaugirard, and on the door in the Rue de la Harpe. Moreover, the man wore the uniform of the musketeers.

The hood of the woman was lowered, and the man held his handkerchief before his face. This double precaution showed that they were both anxious to escape recognition.

They crossed the bridge, and this was also D'Artagnan's road, as he was going to the Louvre; he therefore followed them.

Scarcely, however, had he taken twenty steps before he was convinced that the woman was Madame Bonancieux, and the man Aramis.

At the very instant he felt a thousand fonts of jealousy fermenting in his heart.

He was doubly betrayed—betrayed both by his friend and by the woman he already loved.

Madame Bonancieux had sworn to him that she did not know Aramis, and a quarter of an hour after she had made this oath he found her hanging on his very arm.

D'Artagnan did not reflect that he had only known the mercer's pretty wife during the last three hours, that she only owed him a little gratitude for having delivered her from the men in black, who wished to carry her away; and that she had made him no promise. He looked upon himself as an outraged lover, as a man deceived and laughed at; and the flush of anger rushed into his face, as he resolved to ascertain the truth. The young couple perceived that they were followed and they increased their speed. D'Artagnan, however, had taken his determination; he passed by them, and then returned toward them just as they were opposite the Samaritan, which was lighted by a lamp that threw its brightness over all that part of the bridge.

D'Artagnan drew up in front of them and they stopped also.

"What do you want, sir?" asked the musketeer, recoiling a step, and in a foreign accent, which proved to D'Artagnan that he had at least deceived himself in one of his conjectures.

"It is not Aramis!" he exclaimed.

"No, sir, it is not Aramis; and as I find by you

exclamation that you mistook me for another, I excuse you."

"You excuse me!" said D'Artagnan.

"Yes," replied the unknown; "now let me pass on, since it is not with me that you have business."

"You are right, sir," said D'Artagnan; "it is not with you that I have anything to settle—it is with the lady."

"With the lady! You do not even know her!" exclaimed the stranger.

"You are mistaken, sir, I do know her."

"Ah!" said Madame Bonancieux, in a reproachful tone; "I had your word of honor as a soldier, your promise as a gentleman, and I hoped my faith in you was not misplaced."

"And me," said D'Artagnan, in confusion, "you promised me."

"Take my arm, madame," said the stranger, "and let us proceed."

But D'Artagnan—stunned, overwhelmed, annihilated by all that had happened—remained standing, with his arms crossed, before the musketeer and Madame Bonancieux.

The former came forward two paces and put D'Artagnan aside with his hand.

D'Artagnan made one bound backward and drew his sword.

At the same moment, and with the quickness of lightning the stranger's, also, was unsheathed.

"In God's name, my lord!" said Madame Bonancieux, throwing herself between the combatants, and seizing their swords with both her hands.

"My lord!" cried D'Artagnan, enlightened by a sudden thought; "my lord! pardon me, sir, but can you be——"

"The Duke of Buckingham," said Madame Bonancieux, in a whisper; "and now you will destroy us, one and all."

"My lord—madame—pardon me; a thousand par-

dons ; but—I loved her, and was jealous. You know, my lord, what it is to love ! Pardon me, and tell me how I may die in your grace's cause ! "

" You are a brave youth," said Buckingham, offering him his hand, which D'Artagnan pressed respectfully. " You offer me your services, and I accept them. Follow us at the distance of twenty paces, to the Louvre, and, if any one follows *us*, kill him ! "

D'Artagnan put his naked sword under his arm, let the duke and Madame Bonancieux go forward about twenty steps, and then followed them, ready to execute to the letter the instructions of the elegant and noble minister of Charles I.

But fortunately the young volunteer had no opportunity of proving his devotion to the duke ; and the lady and the handsome musketeer entered the Louvre by the wicket in the Rue de l'Echelle, without encountering any interruption.

As for D'Artagnan, he went immediately to the Pine-apple, where he found Porthos and Aramis waiting for him.

Without giving them any further explanation of the trouble he had caused them, he told them that he had concluded by himself the business for which he at first thought he should have wanted their assistance.

And now, carried on as we have been by our history, let us leave our three friends to return each to his own home, whilst we follow, amidst the windings of the Louvre, the Duke of Buckingham and his fair guide.

CHAPTER XII.

GEORGE VILLIERS, DUKE OF BUCKINGHAM.

MADAME BONANCIEUX and the duke entered the Louvre without any difficulty ; Madame Bonancieux was known to belong to the queen, and the duke wore the uniform

of the musketeers of M. de Treville, who, as we have said, were on guard that evening. Besides, Germain was devoted to the queen, and if anything happened, Madame Bonancieux would have been accused of having introduced her lover into the Louvre—that was all! She took the blame upon herself; her reputation was lost, it was true; but at what value in the world was the reputation of a mercer's wife?

When they were once inside the court, the duke and the young woman kept by the side of the wall for about thirty paces; at the end of which Madame Bonancieux tried a small private door, which was usually open during the day, but closed at night. The door opened, and they both entered and found themselves in total darkness; but Madame Bonancieux was well acquainted with all the turnings and twistings of this part of the Louvre, which was appropriated to the persons of the royal suite. She shut all the doors behind her, took the duke by the hand, and going some steps on tip-toe, took hold of a banister, set foot upon the staircase and began to ascend. The duke had already counted two flights, when she turned to the left, went through a long corridor, descended another stage, walked a few steps forward, introduced a key into a lock, opened a door, and pushed her companion into a room lighted only by a night lamp, saying to him, "Remain here, my lord duke; some one will come immediately." Then she went out by the same door, which she locked after her, so that the duke found himself literally a prisoner.

Yet, though thus, as it were, deserted, the duke, it must be confessed, did not feel the slightest fear. One of the prominent features of his character was the love of adventure and romance. Brave, determined, and enterprising, it was not the first time he had risked his life in like adventures. He had learned that this pretended message of Anne of Austria, on the faith of which he had come to Paris, was a snare; but, instead of returning to England, he had taken advantage of his position and assured the queen that he would not depart

without seeing her. The queen had at first positively refused an interview; but fearing lest the duke might be guilty of some indiscretion in his anger, she had resolved to see him and to entreat him to set out directly, when, on the very evening on which Madame Bonancieux was charged to conduct him to the Louvre, the lady was herself carried off. During two days it was not known what had become of her, and everything continued in suspense. But once free, and in communication with La Porte, affairs had resumed their course; and she had now accomplished the perilous enterprise, which, but for her abduction, she would have executed three days before. Buckingham, being left alone, approached a looking-glass. The dress of a musketeer became him wonderfully well. At thirty-five years old he was justly considered the handsomest man and the most elegant cavalier in France or England. The favorite of two kings, rich as Crœsus, all-powerful in a realm which he disturbed and tranquilized as he pleased, George Villiers, Duke of Buckingham, had engaged in one of these fabulous careers which remain, throughout the course of ages, an astonishment to posterity. Confident in himself, convinced of his own powers, and satisfied that the laws which restrain other people could not reach him, he went straight to the object he had fixed upon, even when that object was so elevated and so dazzling that it would have been madness in another to have even glanced towards it. It was thus that he had managed to approach the beautiful and haughty Anne of Austria, and to make her love him for his brilliant qualities.

Placing himself before the glass, the duke smoothed down his beautiful fair hair, of which the pressure of his hat had disarranged the curls, and put his mustache in order; and then, his heart swelling with joy, happy and elated at having reached the moment he had so long desired, he smiled to himself with pride and hope.

At that moment a door concealed in the tapestry opened, and a woman appeared. Buckingham saw the

reflection in the glass; he uttered a cry; it was the queen!

Anne of Austria was at that time twenty-six or twenty-seven years of age; that is, she was in all the glory of her beauty. Her deportment was that of a queen, or a goddess. Her eyes, which shone like sapphires, were perfectly beautiful, but at the same time full of gentleness and majesty. Her mouth was small and rosy; though her nether lip, like that of the princes of the house of Austria, protruded slightly beyond the other, her smile was eminently gracious, but her expression could be profoundly disdainful when she chose. Her skin was celebrated for its softness, as of velvet, and her hand and arm were of such surpassing loveliness as to be commemorated as incomparable by all the poets of the time. Admirably, too, did her hair, which in her youth had been fair but had now become copper-colored, and which she wore plainly dressed and with a great deal of powder, shade a face on which the most rigid critic could have desired only a little less rouge, and the most fastidious sculptor only a little more delicacy in the formation of the nose.

Buckingham remained an instant perfectly dazzled. Anne of Austria had never appeared to him so beautiful, even in the midst of balls and festivals and entertainments, as now she seemed, in her simple robe of white satin, and accompanied by Donna Estefana, the only one of her Spanish ladies who had not been driven from her by the jealousy of the king, and the persecutions of the cardinal.

Anne of Austria advanced two steps; the duke threw himself at her feet, and before the queen could prevent him, had kissed the hem of her robe.

"My lord, you already know that it was not I who sent for you from England?"

"Oh, yes, madame! yes, your majesty!" exclaimed Buckingham. "I know that I have been a fool, a madman, to believe that snow could become animated, that the marble could grow warm; but what can you expect?

The lover willingly believes in love ; nor has my journey been entirely in vain, since I behold you now."

" Yes," replied Anne, " but you know why and how I see you, my lord. I see you out of compassion to yourself ; I see you, because, insensible to all my distress you persist in staying in a city where, by remaining you risk your own life and my honor ; I see you, to tell you that everything separates us—the depths of the sea the enmity of nations, the sanctity of oaths. It is sacrilege to struggle against such things, my lord ! And lastly, I see you to tell you that I must never see you more."

" Speak, madame—speak, queen," said Buckingham " the softness of your voice repays me twice over for the sternness of your words. You speak of sacrilege, but the sacrilege is in the separation of hearts which God has formed for one another."

" My lord," cried the queen, " you forget that I have never said I loved you."

" But neither have you ever said that you did not love me ; and indeed, to say so would be a proof, too cruel, of ingratitude on the part of your majesty. For tell me, where can you find a love like mine—a love which neither time, nor absence nor despair can overcome, and which is recompensed by a ribbon, by a glance a word ! It is now three years, madame, since I saw you for the first time, and for three years I have adored you. Will you allow me to describe to you your dress on that occasion, and to tell the details of the ornaments you wore ? Yes ! I seem to see you now, seated in the Spanish manner, upon cushions, wearing a dress of green satin, embroidered in silver and gold, with flowing sleeves fastened around your beautiful arms by large diamonds ; you wore also a close ruff ; and a small hat of the same color as your dress, and adorned with a heron's plume, upon your head. Oh ! thus, thus, with closed eyes do I behold you as then you were ; and I open my eyes again, only to see you now, a hundred times more lovely still ! "

"What folly," murmured Anne of Austria, who lacked the harshness to take offense at the duke for preserving her portrait so faithfully in his heart; "what folly to nourish so useless a passion on such memories as these!"

"Alas! what would your majesty exact? I have nothing but these memories; they are my happiness, my treasure, and my hope. Each time I behold you is added a new jewel that I enshrine within the casket of my heart. This is the fourth of them that you have let fall and I have eagerly secured. Yes, in three years, madame, I have seen you but four times; the first I have already recalled to you; the second was at Madame de Chevreuse's; the third was in the gardens of Amiens."

"My lord!" exclaimed the queen, blushing, "do not refer to that evening."

"Oh! rather let us dwell upon it, madame, for it seems the only bright and beatific night of my existence! Does your majesty remember what a lovely night it was? The air was laden with sweetness, the deep sky spangled with innumerable stars. Ah! madame, I was alone with you for an instant then, and you were about to make me the confidant of your griefs—of the isolation of your life and the deep sorrows of your heart. You were leaning on my arm—on this arm, madame—and, when I leaned my head toward you, I felt my face gently brushed by your beautiful hair; and every time that so I felt it, I trembled in each fibre of my heart. Oh! queen! queen! you know not the heavenly bliss, the joys of paradise, which I experienced at that moment. Home, fortune, glory, life, gladly would I give them all for another interview like that, on such a night; for, madame, I will swear that then, at least for that night, *you loved me!*"

"My lord, it is possible that the influence of the place, the charm of that enchanting evening, the fascination of your looks, and the thousand circumstances which sometimes concur in leading a woman onward to her fall, may have grouped themselves around me on that fatal night; but you are not ignorant, my lord, that the

queen but came to the rescue of the weakness of the woman ; and that at the first word that you presumed to say, at the first freedom that you dared to take, I summoned others to my presence there ! "

" Alas ! it is but too true, and any feebler love than mine would never have survived the test ; but my love, madame, came out from it more ardent, being immortal. You thought to escape from me by returning to Paris ; you believed that I should never dare to quit the treasure which my master had commanded me to guard ; but what cared I for all the treasures and all the kings upon the earth ? In one week, madame, I returned. On that occasion, madame, you had nothing to complain of ; I had risked favor and life to see you for a single second ; I did not even touch your hand ; and you forgave me when you found I was submissive and repentant."

" Yes, my lord ; but you are well aware that calumny fastened even upon those follies in which I had so infinitesimal a share. Prompted by the cardinal, the king's resentment was extreme. Madame de Vernet was dismissed ; Putange was banished ; and Madame de Chevreuse disgraced. And do you not remember, my lord, that when you wished to return as an ambassador to France, it was his majesty himself by whom you were opposed ? "

" Yes ; and France is about to pay with a war for that opposition. I cannot see you again, madame ; well, I will take care that you shall hear of me. What do you suppose was the real design of that expedition to Ré, and that league which I am projecting with the Protestants ? The delight of seeing you ! I am well enough aware that I have no chance of reaching Paris at the head of an army ; but, then, this war must bring about a peace ; peace will require negotiations, and those negotiations shall be carried through by none but me. They will no longer dare to reject me then ; and I shall return to Paris and behold you once again, and be, for an instant, happy. It is but too true that my enjoyment will have been bought by the blood of thousands

it what will their lives be to me, provided my eyes are est once more by seeing you? This may be folly, adame—possibly madness; but tell me, pray, had er lady more impassioned lover, had ever queen a ore enthusiastic servant?"

"My lord, my lord! the witnesses you call for your efence condemn you. These very proofs you give me your love are almost crimes."

"But only because you do not love me, madame. Oh, you loved me, how different would these circumstances em; but the joy would be too great, and I should be stracted by my bliss. You spoke but now, madame, Madame de Chevreuse; but oh, how much less cruel as that lady than you are! Holland loved her and e smiled upon his love!"

"Madame de Chevreuse was not a queen," murmured nne of Austria, subdued in spite of herself by the xpression of a passion so profound.

"And would you then love me if you were not? Oh, ll me, madame! say that you would love me! Let e believe that it is but the dignity of your rank that as made you thus merciless to me! Let me believe hat if you had been but Madame de Chevreuse, there ight have been hope for the unhappy Buckingham! h, enchanting queen! thanks for those sweet words; thousand, thousand thanks!"

"Alas, my lord! you misunderstand me; I did not ean to infer——"

"Hush! hush!" exclaimed the duke. "Be not so uel as to correct an error that is so full of happiness me! You have yourself told me that I have been rawn into a snare; it may be that my life will be the rfeit, for, strangely enough, for some time I have had resentiments of approaching death." And the duke owed with a sad, yet winning smile.

"Oh, God!" exclaimed the queen in a tone of terror, hich manifested, more fully than she might have wished, er interest in the duke.

"But I did not tell you this to alarm you, madame.

No, it is even ridiculous to speak of it ; and, believe me I attach no importance to such silly dreams. But th words which you have just uttered, the hope which yo almost gave me, would be a recompense for everything even for my life ! "

" Ah ! " said Anne of Austria, " and I also have ha my presentiments. I dreamed that I saw you stretche upon the earth, all bloody from a wound."

" In the *left* side, and inflicted by a *dagger*, was i not ? " said the duke.

" Yes, my lord ! it was in the left side, and by dagger. But who could have told you of my dream I have never spoken of it but in my prayers to God."

" I would not covet more ; and you love me, madame yes, you love me ! "

" I !—*love* you ? "

" Yes, you ! Would God send to you the same dream as to me, if you did not love me ? Should we be visite by the same presentiments, if our two existences wer not united by love ? Yes, queen, you love me, and yo weep for me ! "

" Oh, my God, my God ! " exclaimed the queen, " thi is more than I can bear. In the name of Heaven, m lord, withdraw ! I know not whether I love you or not but this I know, that I will never break my vow. Hav pity on me, then, and leave this kingdom. Oh ! if yo should be wounded in France—if you should die i France—if I could imagine that your love for me ha been the cause of your death, I should never be con soled. The thought would madden me ! Depart, then depart, I beseech you."

" Oh ! how beautiful you are now ! How devotedl I love you ! " exclaimed Buckingham.

" Depart, I implore you, and return hereafter," con tinued the queen ; " come back as an ambassador ; a a minister ; come back, surrounded by your guards wh will defend you, and your servants who will watch ove you, and then I shall have no fear for your life, an shall have some happiness in seeing you."

"Oh! but is it really true what you now tell me?"

"Yes."

"Give me, then, some pledge of your regard—some object which has once been yours—to satisfy me that I have not been indulging in a dream; something that you have once worn, and that I may wear now—a ring, a bracelet, or a chain!"

"And will you go if I give you what you ask?"

"Yes."

"Immediately?"

"Yes."

"You will quit France and will return to England?"

"Yes, I swear it."

"Wait a moment, then; wait, sir."

And the queen returned to her chamber and came back almost in an instant, holding in her hand a small casket of rosewood, inlaid with gold, on which her own initials were engraved.

"Here, my lord, here! keep this as a memorial of me!"

Buckingham took the casket and again sunk upon his knee.

"You promise me to go," said the queen.

"And I will keep my word! Your hand, madame, and I leave you."

Closing her eyes, and leaning on Donna Estefana—for she felt her strength was failing her—Anne of Austria extended her hand.

Buckingham pressed his lips passionately on that beautiful hand, and then arose.

"Before six months have passed," said he, "if I be not dead I will see you again, if I disturb the world in the attempt."

And, true to his promise, he rushed out of the room.

In the corridor he found Madame Bonancieux awaiting him; and with the same precaution, and the same happy result, she led him out of the Louvre.

CHAPTER XIII.

MONSIEUR BONANCIEUX.

THERE was one person in all this affair, as may hav been remarked, concerning whom, in spite of his pre carious situation, no one appeared much to disquie himself. This was M. Bonancieux, a respectable mar tyr to the political and amorous intrigues which s inextricably entangled themselves in that chivalrous an gallant age. Fortunately, as our readers may or ma not remember, we have promised not to lose sight o him.

The officers who had arrested him conducted him a once to the Bastile, where he had to pass, frightene already as he was, before a company of soldiers, wh were loading their muskets.

Taken from there into a partly subterranean gallery he had to endure the most brutal insults and ill-treat ment. The attendants saw that he was not a gentle man, and they treated him, therefore, like a beggar.

In about half an hour a registrar came to put an en to his tortures, but not to his anxiety, by ordering tha he should be conducted to the question chamber. Th prisoners were generally questioned in their own cells but they did not observe so much ceremony with M Bonancieux.

Two guards laid hold of the mercer, and made hir cross a court, and then, entering a corridor, where ther were three sentinels, they opened a door and pushe him into a low room, of which the only furniture wa a table, a chair, and a commissary. The commissar was seated on a chair, and was engaged in writing a the table.

The two guards led the prisoner to the table, and at signal from the commissary went out of hearing. Th commissary, who had till then kept his head bent dow over his papers, raised it up to see whom he had befor

him. This commissary was a man who had a very crabbed look; a sharp nose; cheeks yellow but puffy; small and searching eyes, and a countenance reminding one, at the same time, of a polecat and a fox. His head, supported by a long and flexible neck, was thrust out of his full black robe, and balanced itself with a motion very much like that of a turtle peering round from its loose carapace.

He began by asking M. Bonancieux his Christian and surname, his age, profession, and place of abode.

The prisoner replied that his name was Jacques Bonancieux, that his age was fifty-one, that he was a retired mercer, and lived in the Rue des Fossoyeurs, number eleven.

Instead of continuing his questions, the commissary then made him a long speech on the danger of an obscure citizen interfering in public affairs. With this exordium he combined an exposition of the power and actions of the cardinal—that incomparable minister, the superior of all preceding, and the example for all future ministers—whom no one could oppose or thwart with impunity.

After the second part of his discourse he fixed his hawk's eye on poor Bonancieux, and exhorted him to reflect upon the seriousness of his situation.

The reflections of the mercer were already made; he wished M. de la Porte at the devil for having put it into his head to marry his god-daughter, and cursed the hour when that god-daughter had been received into the queen's service.

The foundation of M. Bonancieux's character was profound selfishness, mingled with sordid avarice, the whole being seasoned with excessive cowardice. The love which he entertained for his young wife was quite a secondary sentiment, which could not stand against the primary feelings we have just enumerated.

Bonancieux, in fact, reflected on what had been said to him.

"But, M. Commissaire," he timidly observed, "be-

lieve me, that I well know and appreciate the incomparable merit of his eminence, by whom we have the honor to be governed."

"Really?" said the commissary, with a doubtful look. "But if this be true, how come you in the Bastile?"

"How I am here, or, rather, why I am here," replied Bonancieux, "is what it is utterly impossible for me to tell you, seeing that I do not know myself, but most certainly it is not for having offended, consciously, at least, the cardinal."

"It is certain, nevertheless, that you must have committed some crime, as you are here accused of high treason."

"Of high treason!" cried Bonancieux, confounded; "of high treason! And how can you believe that a poor mercer, who hates the Huguenots and abhors the Spaniards, can be accused of high treason? Reflect, sir, the thing is morally impossible."

"M. Bonancieux," said the commissary, regarding the accused with his little eyes, as though he had the power of looking into the very depths of his heart, "M. Bonancieux, you have a wife."

"Yes, sir," replied the trembling mercer, perceiving that it was on her account that he was now about to be embroiled; "that is to say, I had one."

"What! you had one? And what have you done with her, if you have one no longer?"

"Some one has carried her off, sir."

"Some one has taken her from you?" said the commissary. "Ah!"

Bonancieux perceived by this that matters were getting worse and worse.

"Some one has taken her from you?" resumed the commissary. "And do you know who has been guilty of this abduction?"

"I think I know."

"Who is it?"

"Remember that I affirm nothing, M. Commissaire—I only suspect."

"Whom do you suspect? Come, speak frankly."

M. Bonancieux was in the greatest perplexity. Ought he to deny everything, or confess? From a total denial it might be inferred that he knew more than he dared admit; and, by a general confession, he might give evidence of his good intentions.

He determined, therefore, to have no concealments.

"I suspect," he said, "a tall, dark man, of lofty air, who has all the appearance of a man of rank. He followed us, I think, many times, when I went to fetch my wife from the gate of the Louvre."

The commissary appeared somewhat disturbed.

"And his name?" said he.

"Oh, as to the name, I do not know it; but if I should meet him, I could recognize him amongst a thousand.'

The brow of the commissary grew dark.

"You could recognize him amongst a thousand, you say?" continued he.

"That is to say," replied Bonancieux, who saw that he had made a false step, "that is to say——"

"You have said that you could recognize him," said the commissary; "very well, that is enough for to-day; it is necessary, before we proceed any further, that some one should be informed that you know the person who has carried off your wife."

"But I did not tell you that I knew him," cried M. Bonancieux, in despair; "I told you, on the contrary——"

"Take away the prisoner!" exclaimed the commissary to the guards.

"And where must we conduct him?" asked the registrar.

"To a dungeon."

"To which?"

"Oh! to the first that offers, provided it be secure," answered the commissary, with an indifference which filled the breast of poor Bonancieux with loathing and dismay.

"Alas! alas!" thought he, "misfortune overwhelms

me. My wife must have committed some frightfu crime, and I am supposed to be an accomplice and shal be punished with her. She must have said something —have confessed that she told me all. A woman is such a weak creature! A dungeon! The first that offers that's it. A night is soon passed; and then, to-morrow to the wheel, to the gibbet! Oh! my God, my God take pity on me!"

Without in the least attending to the lamentations o Master Bonancieux, which were of that kind that they were tolerably well accustomed to, the two guards took him by the arms and led him away, while the commissary hastily wrote a letter, for which his officer waited.

Bonancieux did not close an eye; not because his dungeon was so disagreeable, but because his anxiety was so great. He sat upon his stool the whole night trembling at every noise; and when the first rays o light penetrated his chamber, Aurora herself appeared to him to be dressed in funeral array.

Suddenly he heard the bolts withdrawn and gave terrible start. He believed that they were coming t conduct him to the scaffold, and, therefore, when he saw that it was only the commissary and his attendant, h was almost ready to jump into their arms.

"Your affair has become sadly complicated since last evening, my fine fellow," said the commissary. "I advise you to tell the whole truth, for your repentance alone can mitigate the anger of the cardinal.'

"But I am ready to tell everything," said Bonancieux; "everything, at least, that I know; question me, I beseech you!"

"Where is your wife, in the first place?"

"I told you that some one has carried her off."

"Yes, but since five o'clock yesterday evening, thanks to you, she has escaped."

"My wife escaped!" cried Bonancieux; "oh, the wretch! Sir, if she has escaped, I assure you it is not my fault."

"What were you doing, then, in the apartment o

your neighbor, M. d'Artagnan, with whom you had a long conference during the day ? "

" Ah, yes, M. le Commissaire, yes, that is true, and I confess I was wrong in that ; yes, I *was* in M. d'Artagnan's apartments."

" And what was the object of that visit ? "

" To entreat him to assist me in finding my wife. I thought I had a right to reclaim her. I was mistaken, it appears, and I humbly beg your pardon."

" And what answer did M. d'Artagnan give ? "

" M. d'Artagnan promised me his assistance, but I soon perceived that he betrayed me."

" You would mislead justice ! M. d'Artagnan made an agreement with you, and in virtue of that agreement he put to flight the officers who had arrested your wife, and has now secreted her where all our search has proved in vain."

" M. d'Artagnan has taken away my wife ? Alas ! what do you tell me ? "

" Fortunately, M. d'Artagnan is in our power, and you shall be confronted with him."

" Ah, faith ! I desire nothing better," cried M. Bonancieux ; " I shall not be sorry to see the face of an acquaintance."

" Bring in M. d'Artagnan," said the commissary to the two guards.

The guards brought in Athos.

" M. d'Artagnan," said the commissary, addressing Athos, " declare what passed between you and that other gentleman."

" But," cried M. Bonancieux, " that is not M. d'Artagnan ! "

" What ! not M. d'Artagnan ? " cried the commissary.

" By no means," answered Bonancieux.

" What is the gentleman's name ? " demanded the commissary.

" I cannot tell you ; I don't know him," replied Bonancieux.

" What ! you do not know him ? "

"No."

"You never saw him before?"

"Yes; but I do not know his name."

"Your name?" demanded the commissary.

"Athos," answered the musketeer.

"But that is not the name of a man, it is the name of a mountain!" screamed the commissary, who began to get confused.

"It is my name," calmly replied Athos.

"But you said your name was D'Artagnan."

"I?"

"Yes, you!"

"The fact is, they said to *me*, 'You are M. d'Artagnan;' I replied, 'Do you think so?' My guards said they were *sure* of it. I did not wish to contradict them; besides, I might be mistaken."

"Sir, you insult the majesty of justice."

"Not at all," calmly replied Athos.

"You *are* M. d'Artagnan?"

"You see that you still tell me so."

"But," cried M. Bonancieux, "I tell you, M. le Commissaire, that there is not the smallest doubt. M. d'Artagnan is my lodger, and, consequently, as he does not pay his rent, I have reason to know him. M. d'Artagnan is a young man of nineteen or twenty years of age, at most, and this gentleman is at least thirty. M. d'Artagnan is in the guards of M. des Essarts, and this gentleman is in the company of M. de Treville's musketeers; observe the uniform."

"By heavens! it is true," muttered the commissary. "It is true, by God!"

At this moment the door was quickly opened and a messenger, shown in by one of the turnkeys of the Bastile, handed the commissary a letter.

"Oh! the wretch!" exclaimed the commissary.

"What? of whom do you speak? It is not of my wife, I hope."

"On the contrary, it *is* of her. Your affairs are in a nice state."

"Do me the favor," said the exasperated mercer, "to tell me, sir, how my affairs can be made worse by anything my wife chooses to do whilst I am in prison?"

"Because what she does is the consequence of a plan arranged between you—an infernal plot!"

"I swear to you, M. le Commissaire, that you are in the most profound error; that I know nothing in the world of what my wife is doing; that I am completely ignorant of what she *has* done; and that, if she has committed follies, I renounce her, I give her the lie, and I curse her."

"And now," said Athos, "if you have no further business with me, dismiss me. Your M. Bonancieux is very tiresome."

"Take the prisoners back to their dungeons" said the commissary, pointing to Athos and Bonancieux, "and guard them more strictly than ever."

"Nevertheless," said Athos, with his usual tranquillity, "your business is with M. d'Artagnan; I do not well see how I can supply his place."

"Do what I have ordered!" cried the commissary, "and the strictest solitude—do you hear?"

Athos followed the guards, shrugging his shoulders; and M. Bonancieux was led out, uttering lamentations that might have softened the heart of a tiger.

They took the mercer into the same dungeon where he had passed the night, and left him there throughout the day. Hour after hour did poor Bonancieux weep like a veritable linen-draper: he was not at all a man of warlike soul, as he himself has told us.

About nine o'clock in the evening, just as he had made up his mind to go to bed, he heard steps in his corridor. These steps approached his dungeon, the door opened and the guards appeared.

"Follow me," said an usher, who stood behind the guards.

"Follow you!" cried Bonancieux, "follow you at this time of night! And where? My God!"

"Where we have orders to conduct you."

"But that is no answer."

"It is, nevertheless, the only one we can give you."

"Oh, Lord! oh, Lord!" muttered the poor mercer "I am lost!"

He followed mechanically and without resistance.

He went down the same corridor he had gone through before, crossed a first court, then a second floor; and then at the entrance gate he found a carriage surrounded by four horse-guards. They made him enter this carriage, the sergeant placed himself at his side, the door was locked, and they both found themselves in a rolling prison.

The carriage proceeded slowly, like a funeral coach. Through the padlocked bars the prisoner could only see the horses and the pavement. But, like a true Parisian, Bonancieux recognized each street by its corners, its lamps, and its signs. At the moment they reached St. Paul, where the criminals of the Bastile were executed, he nearly fainted, and crossed himself twice. He thought the carriage would have stopped there, but it went on, nevertheless. Further on he was seized with yet greater fear; they were skirting the cemetery of Saint Jean, where the state criminals were buried. One thing alone encouraged him, which was that before burying them their heads were generally cut off, and his head was yet upon his shoulders. But when the carriage took the road to La Grêve, and he perceived the painted roof of the Hôtel de Ville and saw that the carriage was driven beneath its colonnade, he thought it was all over with him, and wished to confess himself to the sergeant; and on his refusal, uttered such piteous cries that the sergeant declared that if he continued to deafen him so, he would put a gag on him. This threat reassured him a little; if they meant to hang him at La Grêve, it was scarcely worth while to gag him, as they had nearly reached the place of execution. In fact, the carriage crossed this fatal place without stopping. There was only the Croix du Trahoir then, to fear, and the carriage took exactly the road to it

This time there was no further room for doubt. It was at the Croix du Trahoir that inferior criminals were executed. Bonancieux had flattered himself in considering that he was worthy of St. Paul, or the Place de Grève. It was at the Croix du Trahoir that his journey and his destiny would end. He could not yet see this unhappy cross, but he felt it, as it were, come before him. When he was only about twenty paces from it, he heard a noise and the carriage stopped. This was more than poor Bonancieux could bear; already crushed by the successive emotions he had experienced, he uttered a feeble cry, or rather groan, which might have been taken for the last sigh of a dying man, and fainted.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE MAN OF MEUNG.

THE assemblage that stopped the way was produced, not by the expectation of seeing a man hung, but by the contemplation of a body already hanging. After a few moments' delay the carriage proceeded on its way through the crowd, went along the Rue St. Honoré, and turning at the Rue des Bon-Enfants, stopped at a low gate.

When the door opened, two guards received Bonancieux in their arms, assisted by the sergeant, and pushed him into a court; they then made him ascend a staircase, and seated him in an ante-chamber. All these operations were performed nearly mechanically, as far as he was concerned. He walked as in a dream; he saw things as through a mist; he heard without understanding; and they might at that moment have executed him without his making the slightest resistance, or uttering an appeal for mercy.

He remained without movement on the bench, with his back resting against the wall, and his arms hanging

down, on the very spot where his guards had place him.

And yet, as in looking around him he saw nothin alarming, as nothing indicated any real danger, as th bench was comfortably stuffed, as the wall was covere with beautiful cordovan leather, and as long curtains c red damask, held by gilt brackets, hung before th windows, he became by slow degrees aware that h fears were exaggerated, and began to move his hea from right to left, and from below, upward. At th motion, which no one opposed, he resumed a litt courage, ventured to draw up one leg, and then th other ; and at last, supporting himself by both arms, h raised himself on the bench, and found himself on h feet, safe and sound.

At this moment an officer of respectable appearanc opened a door, exchanged a few words with some perso in the next room, and then turning toward the prisone said :

" Your name is Bonancieux ? "

" Yes, sir," stammered the mercer, more dead tha alive, " at your service."

" Enter ! "

The officer stepped on one side to let the mercer pass and the latter, obeying without a reply, entered a roo where he appeared to be expected.

It was a large cabinet, the walls of which were fu nished with offensive and defensive weapons ; a clo and suffocating room, in the grate of which already fire burned, though it was scarcely yet the end of Se tember. A square table, littered with books and paper on the top of which lay unrolled an immense plan the town of Rochelle, occupied the middle of the apar ment. In front of the chimney-piece stood a man middle height, with a magisterial and haughty a piercing eyes, a large forehead, and an emaciated count nance, which was yet further elongated by an imperi surmounted by a pair of mustaches.

Although this man was scarcely thirty-six or thirt

even years old, both imperial and mustaches were beginning to turn gray. His appearance, except that he ore no sword, indicated the soldier; and his buff ather boots, which were yet slightly powdered with dust, owed that he had been on horseback during the day.

This individual was Armand Jean Duplessis, Cardinal e Richelieu; not as he is represented—broken down ke an old man, suffering like a martyr, his body shattered, his voice extinguished, buried in an enormous sy-chair, no longer living save by the power of his ill, and only supporting the struggle against Europe the dauntless energy of his extraordinary genius—t such as he really was at this period; that is, a skillful d gallant cavalier, already feeble in body, but upheld a moral force that made him one of the most uniralleled of mankind, and now preparing himself, after staining the Duc de Nevers in his duchy of Mantua, d taking Nismes, Castres and Elzes, to drive the nglish from the Isle of Ré, and to undertake the siege La Rochelle.

At first sight, nothing denoted that it was the cardinal, d it was impossible for those who were unacquainted th his person to guess in whose presence they were.

The unhappy mercer remained standing at the door, hilst the eyes of the person whom we have been deribing fixed themselves upon him as if they would netrate his most secret thoughts.

"Is this Bonancieux?" he demanded, after a moment's ence.

"Yes, my lord," replied the officer.

"Very well; hand me those papers, and leave us."

The officer took the papers that were pointed out, gave em to him who asked for them, bowed to the very ound, and left the room.

In these papers Bonancieux recognized his examinans at the Bastile. From time to time the man by e fireplace lifted his eyes from the papers, and plunged em, like twin poniards, into the very heart of the or haberdasher.

At the end of ten minutes' reading, and ten seconds examination of Bonancieux, the cardinal had made up his mind.

"That head has never conspired," murmured he "but never mind, we will question him."

"You are accused of high treason," said the cardinal slowly.

"That is what they have already told me, my lord!" said Bonancieux, giving his interrogator the same title that he had heard the officer give him; "but I give you my oath that I knew nothing about it."

The cardinal suppressed a smile.

"You have conspired with your wife, with Madame de Chevreuse, and with my Lord Duke of Buckingham."

"Indeed, my lord," replied the mercer, "I have heard all those names mentioned by her."

"And on what occasion?"

"She said that the Cardinal de Richelieu had enticed the Duke of Buckingham to Paris, to destroy him and the queen."

"She said that, did she?" cried the cardinal, with great violence.

"Yes, my lord; but I told her that she was wrong in even hinting such a thing, and that his eminence was incapable——"

"Hold your tongue! you are a fool," replied the cardinal.

"That is exactly what my wife told me, my lord."

"Do you know who carried off your wife?"

"No, my lord."

"But you had some suspicions?"

"Yes, my lord, but these suspicions appeared to displease the commissary, and therefore I have them no longer."

"Your wife has escaped; did you know that?"

"No, my lord; I learned it since I have been in prison, from the commissary, who is a most gentlemanly man."

The cardinal suppressed another smile.

"Then you do not know what has become of your wife since her escape?"

"Positively, I do not, my lord; probably she has returned to the Louvre."

"At one o'clock this morning she had not returned."

"Ah! Good God! what can have become of her?"

"Make yourself easy, it will soon be known; nothing escapes the cardinal; the cardinal knows everything."

"In that case, my lord, do you think the cardinal will tell me what has become of my wife?"

"Perhaps so; but it is necessary, first, that you should tell me all you know in relation to the connection of your wife with Madame de Chevreuse."

"But, my lord, I know nothing about it; I never saw her."

"When you went to fetch your wife from the Louvre, did she return directly to your house?"

"Scarcely ever. She had business to transact with the queen's drapers, to whom I conducted her."

"And how many linen-drapers were there?"

"Two, my lord."

"Where do they live?"

"One in the Rue Vaugirard, and the other in the Rue de la Harpe."

"Did you go into these houses with your wife?"

"Never, my lord. I always waited for her at the door."

"And what excuse did she make for entering alone?"

"She did not make any; she told me to wait, and I waited."

"You are a most accommodating husband, my dear M. Bonancieux," said the cardinal.

"He has called me 'my dear sir,'" said the mercer to himself. "'Pon my faith, things are in a favorable way!"

"Should you know those doors again?"

"Yes."

"Do you know the numbers?"

"Yes."

"What are they?"

"No. 25 in the Rue Vaugirard, and No. 75 in the Rue de la Harpe."

"Good!" said the cardinal; and taking a silver bell he rang it.

"Go," said he, in a low tone to the officer who entered; "go and find Rochefort, and tell him to come here directly, if he is within."

"The count is here," said the officer, "and requests an immediate audience with your eminence."

"Your eminence!" muttered Bonancieux, who knew that such was the title ordinarily given to the cardinal "your eminence!"

"Let him come in, then, let him come in!" said Richelieu, eagerly.

The officer turned and left the room, with the rapid obedience the cardinal ever exacted from his followers.

"Your eminence!" again muttered Bonancieux, his eyes rolling in astonishment.

Two seconds had scarcely elapsed before the door opened again, and another person entered.

"It is he!" exclaimed Bonancieux.

"Who is 'he'?" demanded the cardinal.

"The man that ran away with my wife."

The cardinal rang a second time, and the officer re appeared.

"Put this man into the hands of the two guards, and let him wait until I send for him."

"No, my lord, no, it is not he!" exclaimed Bonancieux; "no, I was mistaken; it is another person, no in the least like him. The gentleman is an honest man.

"Take away that simpleton!" said the cardinal.

The officer took him by the arm and led him to the ante-chamber, where he was met by the two guards.

The person who had last entered impatiently followed Bonancieux with his eyes till he was gone, and, when the door was closed behind him,—

"They have met!" said he, eagerly approaching the cardinal.

"Who?" demanded the cardinal.

"Those two."

"The queen and the duke?" cried the cardinal.

"Yes!"

"And where?"

"At the Louvre!"

"Are you sure?"

"Perfectly."

"Who told you?"

"Madame de Lannoy, who is entirely devoted to your eminence, as you well know."

"Why did she not speak sooner?"

"Either by chance, or through mistrust, the queen made Madame de Surgis sleep in her room, and kept it throughout the day."

"Very well; but we have been beaten: we will have our revenge."

"Rest assured I will assist your eminence with all my soul."

"How did this all happen?"

"At half-past twelve the queen was with her women."

"Where?"

"In her bed-chamber—when a pocket-handkerchief was brought to her from her seamstress."

"Well!"

"The queen immediately showed great emotion, and grew pale, in spite of the rouge with which her face was covered."

"Well, what next?"

"Nevertheless she arose, and in an agitated voice said, 'Ladies, wait ten minutes for me, and I will return.' Then opening the door of the alcove, she went out."

"Why did not Madame de Lannoy come and tell me instantly?"

"There was no certainty about it; besides, the queen had said, 'Ladies, wait for me.' And she dared not disobey her majesty."

"And how long did the queen remain absent from her room?"

"Three-quarters of an hour."

"Did none of her women accompany her?"

"Only Donna Estefana."

"And she came back afterwards?"

"Yes, but merely for an instant, to get a small rose-wood casket, bearing her initials, with which she went out again directly."

"And when she came back, at last, did she bring the casket with her?"

"No."

"Does Madame de Lannoy know what the casket contained?"

"Yes! the diamond studs which his majesty presented to the queen."

"And she came back without the casket?"

"Yes."

"Then the opinion of Madame de Lannoy is, that she gave this casket to Buckingham?"

"She is certain of it."

"How so?"

"During the day, Madame de Lannoy, in her office of tire-woman to the queen, looked for this casket, appeared uneasy at not finding it, and ended by inquiring for it of the queen."

"And then the queen——"

"The queen blushed deeply, and answered that, having the evening before broken one of her studs, she had sent it to her jewelers to be repaired."

"You must go there and ascertain whether that is true or not."

"I have been there."

"Well, and the goldsmith——"

"The goldsmith has heard nothing about it."

"Good! good! Rochefort, all is not lost, and perhaps—perhaps all is for the best."

"The fact is, that I have no doubt that the genius of your eminence——"

"May repair the follies of my agent! Is that what you mean?"

"That is exactly what I was about to say, if your eminence had permitted me to finish the sentence."

"Now do you know where the Duchess de Chevreuse and the Duke of Buckingham concealed themselves?"

"No, my lord, my people have no positive information on that point."

"I know it though, myself."

"You, my lord?"

"Yes, or at least, I have no doubt of it. They lived, the one in the Rue Vaugirard, at No. 25, and the other in the Rue de la Harpe, No. 75."

"Does your eminence wish me to arrest them both?"

"It is too late; they are gone."

"Never mind, we can make sure!"

"Take ten of my guards and ransack both houses."

"It shall be done, my lord."

So saying, Rochefort rushed from the room.

When the cardinal was left alone he remained a moment in thought, and then rang a third time.

The same officer appeared.

"Bring back the prisoner," said the cardinal.

Bonancieux was again brought in, and at a sign from the cardinal, the officer withdrew.

"You have deceived me," said the cardinal, with great severity.

"I!" cried Bonancieux, "I—deceive—your eminence!"

"When your wife went to the Rue Vaugirard, and the Rue de la Harpe, she did not go to linen-drapers."

"Good God! To whom did she go, then?"

"She went to see the Duchess de Chevreuse and the Duke of Buckingham."

"Yes!" said Bonancieux, recalling all his observations: "yes, exactly so; your eminence is right. I often told my wife it was astonishing that linen-drapers should live in such houses; in houses which had no signs; and every time I said so, my wife would laugh. Ah! my lord!" continued Bonancieux, throwing himself at the feet of his eminence, "it is plain that you

are the cardinal, the great cardinal—the man of genius, whom all the world reveres!"

The cardinal, paltry as was the triumph he had achieved over a being so vulgar as Bonancieux, did not the less enjoy it for a moment. Then, as if a new idea struck him, a smile crossed his face, and stretching out his hand to the mercer:

"Rise, my friend," said he; "you are a worthy fellow."

"The cardinal has taken my hand! I have touched the hand of the great man!" exclaimed Bonancieux; "the great man has called me his friend."

"Yes, my friend, yes," said the cardinal, in that paternal tone which he knew on occasion how to assume, but which only deceived those who did not know him; "and as you have been unjustly suspected, we must make you some amends. Here, take this bag of a hundred pistoles, and forgive me."

"*I* forgive *you*, my lord!" exclaimed Bonancieux, hesitating to take the bag, from a fear that this pretended gift was only a joke. "But you were quite at liberty to have me arrested, you are quite at liberty to send me to the torture, you are quite at liberty to hang me; you are my master, and I should not have the smallest word to say against it. Forgive you, my lord! But you cannot mean that?"

"Ah! my dear M. Bonancieux, you are very generous; I see it, and I thank you. But you must take this bag; and then you will go away not very discontented—will you not?"

"I go away perfectly enchanted, my lord!"

"Adieu, then; or, rather, adieu till our next meeting; for I hope that we shall see each other again."

"As often as my lord may please; I am at your eminence's command."

"It shall be often, depend upon it; for I have found your conversation charming."

"Oh! my lord!"

"Farewell, till our next meeting, M. Bonancieux—till our next meeting."

Bonancieux, at a wave of the cardinal's hand, bowed low and then backed awkwardly from the room. As he reached the ante-room, the cardinal heard him, in his enthusiasm, crying out, at the top of his voice, "Long live his eminence! Long live the great cardinal!"

Richelieu listened with a smile to this noisy manifestation of the enthusiastic feelings of Master Bonancieux; and when his shouts were lost in the distance: "There," said he, "is a man who now at any time would die for me!"

The cardinal then set himself to examine with great attention the map of La Rochelle, which was spread out upon the table, and to mark with a pencil the position of the famous embankment which eighteen months afterwards was destined to close the port of the besieged city.

Whilst he was most deeply occupied with these strategic meditations, the door opened, and Rochefort reappeared.

"Well!" said the cardinal, with vivacity, which proved of what consequence he considered the intelligence he expected from the count.

"Well!" said the latter, "a young woman, between twenty-six and twenty-eight years old, and a man of about thirty-five or forty years of age, have really lodged, the one four days, and the other five, in the houses indicated by your eminence; but the woman left last night, and the man this morning."

"It was they!" exclaimed the duke, whose eyes were fixed upon the clock; "but now," he continued, "it is too late to follow them. The duchess is at Tours, and the duke at Boulogne. It is in London that they must be overtaken."

"What are your eminence's commands?"

"Let not one word of what has passed transpire! Let the queen remain in perfect security; let her be ignorant that we know her secret; let her believe that we are hunting after some conspiracy. Send me Seguier, the keeper of the seals."

"And this man? What has your eminence done with him?"

"What man?" demanded the cardinal.

"This Bonancieux."

"I have done all that could be done with him. I have made him a spy upon his wife."

The Count de Rochefort bowed low, like a man who felt the great superiority of his master, and withdrew.

As soon as the cardinal was again alone, he seated himself once more, and wrote a letter, which he sealed with his private signet, and then rang his bell. The officer entered for the fourth time.

"Tell Vitry to come here," said the cardinal, "and order him to prepare himself for a journey."

In another five minutes the man he had sent for was standing before him, booted and spurred.

"Vitry," said he, "you must set off at once, without an instant's delay, to London. You must not stop one moment on the road, and you will give this letter to Milady. There is an order for two hundred pistoles to go to my treasurer and get the money. You shall have the same sum if you return in six days, having duly performed my commission."

The messenger, without answering one word, bowed, took the letter, and the order for two hundred pistoles, and left the room.

These were the contents of the letter:

"My Lady,—Be present at the first ball where you can meet the Duke of Buckingham. He will have on his doublet twelve diamond studs; get close to him and cut off two. The moment these studs are in your possession let me know."

CHAPTER XV.

CIVILIANS AND SOLDIERS.

On the day after these events, as Athos had not returned, D'Artagnan and Porthos informed M. de Treville of his disappearance.

As for Aramis, he had requested leave of absence for five days, and it was said that he was at Rouen on some family affairs.

M. de Treville was the father of his soldiers. The humblest individual amongst them, from the time that he put on the uniform of the company, was as certain of his assistance and support as his own brother could have been.

He went, therefore, at once to the lieutenant of police. The officer who commanded at La Croix Rouge was sent for, and from various inquiries it was ascertained that Athos was at that time lodged at Fort l'Evêque.

Athos had been subjected to the same trials as we have seen Bonancieux exposed to.

We have witnessed the confrontation of the two prisoners. Athos, who till then had said nothing, feared that D'Artagnan had not had the time he needed, from that moment declared that his name was Athos, and not D'Artagnan. He added that he knew neither Monsieur nor Madame Bonancieux; that he had never spoken either to one or the other; and that he had gone at about ten at night to pay a visit to his friend, M. d'Artagnan, but until that hour he had been at M. de Treville's, where he had dined. Twenty witnesses, he added, could confirm this fact, and he named many distinguished gentlemen, amongst whom was the Duc de la Tremouille.

The second commissary was as much surprised as the first, at these simple but firm declarations by the musketeer, on whom he would gladly have taken that revenge which lawyers so much love to gain over soldiers; but the names of Treville and La Tremouille demanded consideration.

Athos was therefore sent to the cardinal; but his eminence was, unfortunately, at the Louvre with the king.

It was just at this time that M. de Treville, having in vain sought Athos from the lieutenant and the governor of Fort l'Evêque, came to make an application to

his majesty; to whom he had, as captain of the mus keteers, the right of immediate access on all occasions.

The prejudices of the king against his queen are we known—prejudices which were skillfully fostered by th cardinal, who, in regard to political intrigues, stoo much more in fear of women than of men. One of th chief causes of this prejudice was the friendship of th queen for Madame de Chevreuse. These two wome gave his eminence more uneasiness than the Spanis War, the rupture with England, and the embarrassmer of the finances, all combined. He was convinced tha Madame de Chevreuse secretly served the queen, nc only in political affairs, but—what was even mor vexatious to him—in her love intrigues as well.

At the first word which the cardinal had uttered, tha Madame de Chevreuse, who had been exiled to Tours an who was still supposed to be in that city—had come t Paris, and during the five days that she had stayed the had escaped the police—the king became furiously en raged. At once capricious, and unfaithful to his wif Louis still wished to be distinguished as Louis *the ju* and *the good*. Posterity will with difficulty understan this character, which history explains, not by reasonin but by facts.

But when the cardinal added, that not only ha Madame de Chevreuse been in Paris, but that the quee had renewed her friendship with her by means of one i those mysterious correspondences which was then calle a *cabal*—when he affirmed that he, the cardinal, had a but unraveled the threads of this intrigue—when, at th moment that he was about to detect in the very fac provided with the fullest proofs, an emissary of th queen, who was in communication with the exile, musketeer had dared violently to interrupt the cour of justice, by falling, sword in hand, upon the hone officers of the law, who had been charged to examine th whole affair with impartiality, in order to lay it befo the king—Louis was no longer able to restrain himse He took a step towards the queen's apartments, with th

pale and speechless indignation which, when it burst out, led the prince to acts of most unfeeling cruelty.

And yet in all this the cardinal had not said one word concerning the Duke of Buckingham.

It was at that moment that M. de Treville entered, cool, polite, and irreproachably dressed.

Warned of what had taken place not only through the presence of the cardinal, but by the change in the king's countenance, M. de Treville felt himself as strong as Samson before the Philistines.

The king had already placed his fingers upon the handle of the door, but at the noise of M. de Treville's entrance he turned.

"You come in good time, sir," said his majesty, who, when his passions were thoroughly excited, never dissembled, "for I have just heard fine things of your musketeers."

"And I," said Treville, coolly, "have fine things to tell you of your lawyers."

"What is that you say?" said the king, haughtily.

"I have the honor to inform your majesty," said Treville, in the same tone, "that a party of civilians, commissaries, and police agents—people highly respectable in their way, but very unfriendly, as it appears, to the military—have presumed to arrest in a private house, to drag through the public streets, and to cast into Fort l'Evêque—and all this under an order which they refuse to show me—one of my musketeers, or rather of yours, sire, of irreproachable conduct, of an almost illustrious reputation, and favorably known to your majesty—M. Athos!"

"Athos!" said the king, mechanically; "yes, I certainly know the man!"

"Your majesty may remember," said M. de Treville, "M. Athos is the musketeer who, in the vexatious duel that you heard of, had the misfortune to wound M. de Cahusac severely; by-the-bye, my lord," continued Treville, addressing the cardinal, "M. de Cahusac is entirely recovered, is he not?"

"I thank you," said the cardinal, biting his lips with anger.

"M. Athos," continued Treville, "had gone to visit one of his friends who was from home, a young Béarnese, a cadet in his majesty's guards, in the company of Essarts; but scarcely had he settled himself in his friend's room, and taken up a book whilst waiting, when a cloud of bailiffs and soldiers, mingled together, laid siege to the house, breaking open all the doors."

The cardinal here made the king a sign, which signified, "It was on account of the business which I have been telling you about."

"We know all that," said the king, "for it was all done in our service."

"And was it," asked Treville, "in your majesty's service, also, that one of my musketeers, who was perfectly innocent, has been seized, placed between two guards as a malefactor, and marched through the midst of an insolent crowd, although he is a gallant man, who has shed his blood for your majesty many a time, and is ready and willing to spill it again?"

"Bah!" said the king, somewhat shaken, "and did the thing really happen thus?"

"M. de Treville forgets to say," replied the cardinal with the greatest indifference, "that this innocent musketeer, this gallant man, had, only one hour before attacked, sword in hand, four commissaries delegated by me to collect information concerning an affair of the greatest importance."

"I defy your eminence to prove it!" cried Treville with true Gascon frankness and military bluntness; "for an hour before, M. Athos, who, I can assure you is a man of the highest renown, did me the honor, after having dined with me, of conversing in my drawing-room with the Count de Chalons and the Duc de La Tremouille."

The king looked at the cardinal.

"A deposition declares it," said the cardinal, in answer to the mute interrogation of the king; "and the in

dividuals who were maltreated have prepared the statement I have now the honor to present to your majesty."

"Is the affidavit of a civilian of equal value with the word of honor of a soldier?" demanded Treville, fiercely.

"Come, come, Treville, be silent," said the king.

"If his eminence has any suspicions against one of my musketeers," replied Treville, "the justice of the cardinal is so well known that I should myself demand an inquiry."

"In the house in which this attack on justice has been made," said the immovable cardinal, "there lodges, I believe, a Béarnese, a friend of the musketeer."

"Your eminence probably alludes to M. d'Artagnan?"

"I allude to a young man whom you patronize, M. de Treville."

"Yes, your eminence, precisely so."

"Do you not suspect this young man of having given bad advice?"

"To M. Athos—to a man nearly double his own age?" broke in M. de Treville. "No, sir; besides, M. d'Artagnan passed the evening at my house!"

"Ah!" said the cardinal, "everybody seems to have passed the evening at your house!"

"Does his eminence doubt my word?" asked Treville, his face flushed with anger.

"No, God forbid!" said the cardinal; "but I should like to know at what hour was he at your house?"

"Oh! as to that, I can speak positively to your eminence; for, as he entered, I remarked that it was half-past nine by the clock, although I had believed it to be later."

"And at what hour did he leave your hotel?"

"At half-past ten, exactly one hour after this event happened."

"But, at least, M. Athos was seized in that house in the Rue des Fossoyeurs!" said the cardinal, who did not for a moment doubt the loyalty of M. de Treville, yet felt that victory was leaving him.

"Is it unlawful for a friend to visit an acquaintance, or

for a musketeer of my company to keep company with a guard of M. des Essarts ? "

" Yes, when the house where he associates with this friend is under suspicion."

" This house is suspected, Treville ! " said the king " perhaps you did not know that."

" In fact, sire, I did not know it. But, although it might be suspected, I deny that it was in that part which M. d'Artagnan inhabits ; for I can assure you, sire, if I may believe what he has said, there does not exist a more devoted servant of your majesty, or a more profound admirer of the cardinal."

" Was it not this D'Artagnan who wounded Jussac in that unfortunate encounter that took place one day near the Convent des Carmes Déchaussés ? " demanded the king, looking at the cardinal, who colored with spite.

" And Bernajoux the day after. Yes, sire, yes ; it is the same. Your majesty has a good memory ! "

" Come, what shall we decide upon ? " said the king.

" That concerns your majesty more than me," answered the cardinal. " I assert his guilt."

" And I deny it," said Treville. " But his majesty has judges—let them determine on it."

" Exactly so," said the king ; " let us refer the matter to the judges ; it is the business of their lives to judge, and so they shall."

" Only," said Treville, " it is a sad thing, in these unhappy times in which we live, that the purest life, the most indisputable virtue, cannot secure a man from infamy and persecution. The army will be much dissatisfied, I can answer for it, at being the object of such rigorous treatment in reference to affairs of the police."

The expression was imprudent, but Treville had thrown it out purposely. He wished for an explosion because the mine flames out as it explodes, and the coruscation illumines.

" Affairs of the police ! " cried the king, taking up Treville's words. " Affairs of the police ! And what do you know about them, sir ? Busy yourself with your

musketeers, and don't perplex my brain! It would seem, to hear you, that if a musketeer is arrested, France is in danger. All this fuss about a musketeer! I will arrest ten, fifty, a hundred, aye, even the whole company, and will not hear a word!"

"The instant they are suspected by your majesty," said Treville, "the musketeers become guilty. I am ready, therefore, to surrender my sword; for, after having accused my soldiers, I do not doubt that the cardinal will finish by accusing me; and it is unquestionably better that I should deliver myself up a prisoner along with M. Athos, who is already arrested, and with M. d'Artagnan, who will doubtless before long be in prison, too."

"Gascon head! will you have done?" said the king.

"Sire," said Treville, without in the least lowering his voice, "give me up my musketeer, or let him be tried!"

"He shall be tried," said the cardinal.

"Well, so much the better; for then I shall ask your majesty's permission to plead for him."

The king dreaded an outbreak.

"If his eminence," said he, "had not any personal motives——"

The cardinal saw which way the king was tending, and anticipated him.

"Pardon me," said he, "but the moment the king sees in me a prejudiced judge, I retire."

"Come," said the king, "will you swear to me by my father, that M. Athos was at your house during this event, and that he had nothing to do with it?"

"By your glorious father, and by yourself, whom I love and venerate most in all the world, I swear it!"

"You must reflect, sire," said the cardinal, "that if we thus release our prisoner, the truth cannot be discovered."

"M. Athos shall always be forthcoming," said Treville, "when it may please the lawyers to interrogate him. He will not run away. I answer for him myself."

"In reality, he will not desert," said the king. "He

can always be found, as Treville says. "Besides," added he, lowering his voice, and regarding the cardinal with a supplicating air, "put them in security; it is politic."

This policy of Louis XIII. made Richelieu smile.

"Give your orders, sire," said he, "you have the privilege of pardon."

"The privilege of pardon only refers to the guilty," said Treville, who wished to have the last word, "and Monsieur Athos is not guilty. It is not a pardon, therefore, that your majesty is going to grant, but justice."

"Is he at Fort l'Evêque?" asked the king.

"Yes, sire, and in a solitary dungeon, like the vilest of criminals."

"'Od's blood!" said the king, "what is to be done?"

"Sign the order for his release," said the cardinal, "and all will be ended! I believe, as well as your majesty, that M. de Treville's security is more than sufficient."

Treville bowed respectfully, with a joy which was not unmingled with fear. He would have preferred an obstinate resistance on the part of the cardinal to this swift and slippery compliance.

The king signed the order of release, and Treville carried it away immediately.

At the moment he was going out the cardinal gave him a friendly smile, and said to the king:

"Great harmony exists between the officers and the soldiers of your musketeers, sire; it must be very beneficial to the service, and it is honorable to all."

"He will play me some scurvy trick presently," thought Treville; "one has never the last word with such a man as the cardinal. But let me hasten, for the king may change his mind; and, after all, it is more difficult to put a man back into the Bastile, or Fort l'Evêque, who has got out of it, than to keep him prisoner there when they have already caught him."

M. de Treville entered Fort l'Evêque triumphantly and set at liberty his musketeer, who had never for one moment lost his calm indifference.

The first time that he saw D'Artagnan, he said to him: "You have escaped well; your sword-thrust to Jussac is now paid for; that to Bernajoux still remains; but you must not be too confident."

M. de Treville had good reason to distrust the cardinal, and to think that the matter was not at an end; for scarcely had the captain of musketeers closed the door behind him, before his eminence said to the king:

"Now that we two are alone, we must have some serious conversation, if it please your majesty. Sire, the Duke of Buckingham has been in Paris for five days, and only left it this morning."

CHAPTER XVI.

IN WHICH THE KEEPER OF THE SEALS, SEGUIER, LOOKED MORE THAN ONCE AFTER THE BELL, THAT HE MIGHT RING IT AS HE HAD BEEN USED TO DO.

It is impossible to form an idea of the impression which these few words produced on the king. He grew red and pale by turns, and the cardinal saw immediately that he had regained, by a single stroke, all the ground he had previously lost.

"The Duke of Buckingham at Paris!" said he; "and what has he been doing there?"

"No doubt plotting with your enemies, the Huguenots and the Spaniards."

"No! by God, no! Plotting against my honor, with Madame de Chevreuse, Madame de Longueville, and the Condés."

"Oh! sire, what an idea! The queen is too prudent, and above all, loves your majesty too well."

"Woman is feeble," said the king; "and as for her loving me so very much, I have my own opinion."

"Nevertheless, I maintain that the Duke of Buckingham came to Paris for an entirely political object."

"And I am just as sure that he came for other purposes; but, if the queen is guilty, let her tremble."

"After all," said the cardinal, "however unwilling I am to dwell upon a treason of this kind, your majesty brings to my mind that Madame de Lannoy, whom, by your majesty's order, I have several times questioned, told me this morning that the night before last the queen was up very late, that this morning she was weeping very much, and that she had been writing throughout the whole day."

"That confirms it!" said the king; "writing to him, no doubt. Cardinal, I must have the queen's papers!"

"But how are we to get them, sire? It appears to me that neither your majesty nor I can undertake such an office."

"How did they proceed toward the Maréchale d'Ancre?" said the king, in the most violent rage. "They first ransacked her chests, and at last searched her person."

"The Maréchale d'Ancre was only the Maréchale d'Ancre, a Florentine adventuress; but the august spouse of your majesty is Anne of Austria, Queen of France—that is, one of the greatest princesses in the world."

"She is but the greater criminal, duke. The more she has forgotten the high position in which she is placed, the lower has she fallen. For a long time, now, I have been determined to put an end to all these petty intrigues of politics and love. There is, also, one La Porte in her service."

"Whom I believe to be the master contriver in all this."

"Then you think as I do—that my wife is deceiving me," said the king.

"I believe, and I repeat it to your majesty, that the queen plots against the king's power; I never said against his honor."

"And I tell you, against both. I tell you that the queen no longer loves me; I tell you that she loves

another; I tell you that she loves this infamous Duke of Buckingham! Why did you not arrest him whilst he was in Paris?"

"Arrest the duke! Arrest the prime minister of Charles I.! Think, sire, what a commotion! And then, if the suspicions of your majesty had any foundation, which I much doubt, what a dreadful exposure—what a terrible scandal!"

"But if he exposed himself to it, like a vagabond and a pilferer, he ought——"

Louis stopped, frightened at what he had been about to say; whilst Richelieu, stretching out his neck, in vain expected the word which hung upon the king's lips.

"He ought——"

"Nothing," said the king, "nothing. But," added he, "during all the time that he was in Paris, you did not ever lose sight of him?"

"Never, sire!"

"Where did he reside?"

"In the Rue de la Harpe, at No. 75."

"Where is that?"

"Near the Luxembourg."

"And you are certain that the queen and he did not see each other?"

"I believe that the queen is too much attached to her duties, sire!"

"But they correspond; it was to him the queen was writing all day! Duke, I must have those letters."

"Sire, and yet——"

"Duke, at whatever cost, I must have them!"

"I would observe to your majesty, however——"

"And would you betray me, too, cardinal, since you thus oppose my wishes? Are you also in league with the Spaniard and the English? with Madame de Chevreuse and the queen?"

"Sire," replied the cardinal, with a soft smile, "I thought myself far above any such suspicion."

"Cardinal, you hear what I say: I will have these letters!"

"There is only one way."

"What is that?"

"It is to charge M. de Seguier, the keeper of the seals, with this commission. This matter wholly belongs to his office."

"Let him be sent for immediately."

"He must be at my house, sire. I sent for him there and when I came to the Louvre, I left word that he should wait for me!"

"Let him be sent for instantly!"

"Your majesty's orders shall be executed; but——"

"But what?"

"But the queen may perhaps refuse to obey."

"What, my orders?"

"Yes, if she does not know that these orders come from the king."

"Well, then, that she may have no doubt, I will go and tell her myself."

"Your majesty will not forget that I have done all I could to prevent a rupture."

"Yes, duke, yes, I know that you are very indulgent, perhaps too indulgent to the queen; and we must have some talk about that hereafter."

"Whenever your majesty pleases; but I shall be always glad and proud to sacrifice myself for the harmony which I should wish to see between the king and queen of France."

"Well, well, cardinal; but, in the meantime, send for the chancellor. And now I hasten to the queen."

Then opening the door of communication, Louis entered the corridor which led from his own apartments to those of Anne of Austria.

The queen was surrounded by her ladies, Madame de Guitant, Madame de Sable, Madame de Montbazon, and Madame de Guéménée. In the corner was the Spanish lady of the bedchamber, Donna Estefana, who had accompanied her majesty from Madrid. Madame Guéménée was reading aloud and everybody was attending to her, except the queen, who had commanded this read

ing that she might, under pretense of listening, indulge the train of her own thoughts.

These thoughts, all gilded as they were by the sunset beams of love, were not, therefore, the less sad. Anne of Austria—deprived of the confidence of her husband, pursued by the hatred of the cardinal, who would never pardon her repulsion of a softer sentiment, and having constantly before her eyes the queen-mother whom that hatred had tormented throughout her life, although, if the memoirs of the times are to be believed, Maria de Medicis had begun by granting to the cardinal the sentiment which Anne of Austria had persisted in refusing—Anne of Austria had seen her most devoted servants, her most confidential companions, her dearest favorites, fall around her. Like those unhappy beings who are endowed with a baleful nature, she brought misfortune upon everything she touched. Her friendship was a fatal gift that attracted persecution. Madame de Chevreuse and Madame de Vernet were banished, and La Porte did not conceal from his mistress that he was in momentary expectation of arrest.

It was at the very instant she was most profoundly indulging in these melancholy reflections that the door opened and the king entered.

The reader immediately ceased, the ladies arose, and all were mute.

As for the king, he made no show of politeness; only, stopping before the queen,—

"Madame," said he, in an agitated voice, "you are about to receive a visit from the chancellor, who will make known to you certain commands with which I have charged him."

The unhappy queen, who was often threatened with divorce, with exile, and even with death, grew pale to the lips and could not refrain from asking:

"Why that visit, sire? What can the chancellor have to say that your majesty could not yourself tell me?"

The king turned on his heel without any answer; and

almost at the same moment, the captain of the guards, M. de Guitant, announced the presence of the chancellor.

Before the chancellor appeared, the king had already left the apartment by another door.

The chancellor entered, half smiling, and half blushing. As we shall probably fall into his company again in the course of this history, there will be no harm in our readers making acquaintance with him now.

This chancellor was a pleasant fellow. It was by Des Roches le Masle, a canon of Notre Dame, who had formerly been the cardinal's valet, that he had been recommended to his eminence as one entirely devoted to his interests. The cardinal trusted him and was always well served.

The following is one of many stories which were circulated concerning him :

After a stormy youth, he had retired to a convent to expiate, at least for a time, the follies of his youthful years. But in entering this holy place the penitent had been unable to close the door so quickly that the passions which he was flying from could not enter with him. They worried him, in fact, unceasingly ; and the superior—to whom he had confided this disgrace, and who wished to preserve him from it as far as he was able—advised him, in order to drive out the tempting devil, to have recourse to the bell-rope and to pull it with his utmost might ; since, on hearing this denunciatory sound, the monks would understand that a brother was beset by temptation, and the auditors would instantly proceed to pray for him.

The counsel seemed good to the future chancellor, who exorcised the evil spirit by a large supply of prayers which were offered up by the monks. The devil, however, is not easily displaced when he has once got into garrison ; and in proportion as these exorcisms were multiplied the temptation increased ; so that the unceasing clamor of the bell by day and by night perpetually announced the extreme need of mortification the penitent experienced.

The monks no longer found a moment's rest. By day they had nothing to do but go up and down the chapel stairs; and by night, besides complines and matins, they were obliged to jump out of their beds at least twenty times to prostrate themselves upon the floor of their cells.

It is not known whether the devil quitted his hold, or the monks got tired out; but at the end of three months the penitent reappeared in the world with the reputation of being more terribly possessed by the evil spirit than any one who had ever lived.

On leaving the convent he entered the magistracy, and became president, in the place of his uncle. He then joined the cardinal's party, in doing which he evinced no small sagacity; became chancellor; served his eminence zealously against Anne of Austria; stimulated the judges in the business of Chalais; encouraged the experiments of the royal gamekeeper, M. de Laffemas, and, finally, invested with the fullest confidence of the cardinal, which he had so well won, he had just received that singular commission in the execution of which he now presented himself before the queen.

The queen was standing when he entered, but as soon as she perceived who the intruder was, she threw herself back in her easy-chair, and, making a sign for her ladies to place themselves on their cushions and stools, said, in a tone of supreme haughtiness:

"What do you want, sir? And for what object do you come here?"

"To make, madame, in the king's name, and without prejudice to the respect which I entertain for your majesty, an examination of your papers."

"What, sir! an examination of my papers—of mine! Truly, this is utterly disgraceful!"

"Deign to pardon me, madame, but in this affair I am only an instrument which the king uses. Has not his majesty but left the room? and did he not himself invite you to expect this visit?"

"Search, then, sir; I am, it seems, a criminal. Estefana, give up the keys of my tables and desks."

The chancellor went through the formality of searching the room, although he well knew that it was not there the queen would hide the important letter she had that day written.

But when he had, at least twenty times, opened all the drawers and shut them again, it became necessary, in spite of any hesitation he might experience, to end the business by searching the queen herself. The chancellor advanced, therefore, toward her majesty, and, in an embarrassed tone and manner, said :

" And now I must make the principal search."

" And what is that ? " demanded the queen, who did not, or rather would not understand him.

" His majesty is positive that a certain letter has been written by you during the day, and he knows that it has not yet been forwarded to its address. This letter is not to be found either in your table or your desk, and yet it must be somewhere."

" Would you dare to lay your hand upon your queen ? " asked Anne of Austria, assuming all her haughtiness, and fixing on the chancellor eyes whose expression had become almost threatening.

" I am a faithful subject of the king, madame, and everything that his majesty may order, I shall perform."

" Well, it is true ! " exclaimed the queen, " and the spies of the cardinal have served him faithfully. I have written a letter to-day, and that letter has not been dispatched. It is here ! " and her majesty placed her beautiful hand upon her bosom.

" Give me the letter, then, madame," said the chancellor.

" I will only give it to the king, sir ! " said the queen.

" If his majesty had wished the letter to be handed to him, madame, he would have demanded it himself. But I repeat, it is to me that he gave the order to obtain it · and, if you do not give it up——"

" Well ! what then ? "

" It is I who am commanded to take it."

" Sir ! What do you mean to infer ? "

"That my orders go very far, madame, and that I am authorized to seek for this suspected paper, even on the person of your majesty."

"Horrible!" exclaimed the queen.

"Be more compliant, then, madame."

"This conduct is infamous in its violence. Are you not aware of that, sir?"

"The king commands it! Therefore, madame, excuse me."

"I will not endure it. No! no! I will sooner die!" said the queen, whose imperial blood of Spain revolted at the outrage.

The chancellor made a reverential bow, but it was evident that he did not mean to recede one step in the accomplishment of his commission. Just as an executioner's man might have done in the torture-chamber, he approached Anne of Austria, in whose eyes great tears of rage were welling.

The queen was, as we have already said, singularly beautiful. The commission, therefore, was a delicate one; but the king had come, from very jealousy of Buckingham, to be no longer jealous of any other person.

At that moment the chancellor, Seguier, was no doubt looking for the rope of the memorable bell; but not finding it, he made up his mind and moved his hand toward the place where the queen had admitted that the paper was concealed.

Anne of Austria—blanched as though by the near approach of death—receded for a single step. Then, supporting herself by leaning with her left hand on a table which stood beside her, with her right hand she drew the paper from her bosom and presented it to the keeper of the seals.

"Here, sir, take the letter," cried the queen, in a broken, sobbing tone; "take it, and free me from your hateful presence."

The chancellor, who was himself also trembling, from an emotion easy to conceive, took the letter, bowed to the very ground and withdrew.

Scarcely was the door closed upon him before the queen fell senseless into the arms of her women.

The chancellor carried the letter to the king, without having read one syllable of its contents. His majesty took it with a faltering hand, and looked for the direction; but finding none, he grew quite pale, and opened the sheets very slowly. Then, seeing by the first words that it was addressed to the King of Spain, he read it rapidly.

It was a virulent attack against the cardinal. The queen invited her brother and the Emperor of Austria to pretend—offended as they were by the policy of Richelieu, whose constant aim it was to humble the house of Austria—to declare war against France, and to lay down the dismissal of the cardinal as a condition of peace; but of love, there was not one single word in the letter.

The king, in high delight, inquired whether the cardinal was still at the Louvre. The answer was, that his eminence was in the official cabinet, awaiting his majesty's commands.

The king immediately hastened to him.

"Here, duke," said he, "you were right, and I was wrong. The whole intrigue is political, and love was not the subject of this letter. But, instead of love there is a great deal of something quite opposed to love—about yourself."

The cardinal took the letter and read it with the greatest attention; and when he had reached the end he read it through a second time.

"Well, your majesty," said he, "you see how far my enemies dare to go; they threaten you with two wars if you do not dismiss me. Really, sire, in your place I would yield to such pressing inducements; and, for my part, I should be truly happy to retire from affairs of state."

"What are you talking about, duke?"

"I say, sire, that my health fails under these excessive struggles and eternal labors. I say that, in all proba-

bility, I shall be unable to support the fatigues of the siege of La Rochelle ; and that it would be better for you to appoint either M. de Condé, or M. de Bassompierre, or some valiant man whose profession it is to conduct war, instead of me, a churchman, continually turned aside from my vocation to engage in affairs for which I am entirely unfit. You will be more prosperous in your kingdom, sire ; and I doubt not that your policy will also be more triumphant abroad."

"Duke," said the king, "I understand you. Depend upon it, that all those who are mentioned in this letter shall be punished as they deserve, even the queen herself."

"What can your majesty mean? God forbid that the queen should be harassed on my account! She has always believed me her enemy, sire, though your majesty can testify that I have ever warmly taken her part, even against yourself. Oh, if she betrayed your majesty's honor, it would be a very different thing, and I should be the first to say—no mercy, sire, no mercy on the guilty! Happily, there is nothing of the kind here ; and your majesty has just obtained a new proof of her innocence."

"It is true, cardinal, and you were right, as you always are ; but yet the queen has not the less deserved my anger."

"It is you, sire, who have incurred hers ; and if she seriously resents your conduct, I shall not blame her. Your majesty has treated her with great severity!"

"It is thus that I shall always treat my enemies and yours, duke, however lofty they may be, and whatever risk I may incur through my severity."

"The queen is my enemy, but not yours, sire ; she is, on the contrary, a submissive, irreproachable, and devoted wife ; permit me, then, to intercede for her with your majesty."

"Let her humble herself, then, and make the first advances."

"On the contrary, sire, set her the example ; you

were the first in the wrong, since you were suspicious of the queen."

"Make the first advances?" said the king. "Never!"

"Sire, I beseech you!"

"Besides, how could I make advances?"

"By doing something which you know will be agreeable to her."

"What?"

"Give a ball. You know how much the queen loves dancing, and I will answer for it, her anger will not resist such an attention."

"Cardinal, you know that I do not like these worldly pleasures."

"Her majesty will be only the more grateful to you, as she knows your antipathy to this amusement. Besides, it will enable her to wear those beautiful diamond studs which you gave her on her birthday and with which she has not yet had any opportunity to adorn herself."

"We shall see, cardinal, we shall see," said the king, who, in his delight at finding the queen guilty of a fault about which he did not care, but innocent of a crime which he greatly dreaded, was quite ready for a reconciliation. "We shall see; but upon my honor, you are too indulgent."

"Sire," said the cardinal, "leave severity to ministers; indulgence is a royal virtue: make use of it, and you will reap its benefits."

Hearing the clock strike eleven, the cardinal bowed low and begged permission to retire, beseeching his majesty to make his peace with the queen.

Anne of Austria, who, after the seizure of her letter, expected nothing but reproaches, was much surprised the next day to see the king make some attempts at a reconciliation with her. The first sentiment was repulsion; her pride as a woman and her dignity as a queen had both been so cruelly outraged that she was unable to meet these first advances. But, vanquished by the advice of her ladies, she at last appeared to be disposed to forgiveness. The king took advantage of

this first favorable disposition to tell her that he thought of giving an immediate entertainment.

An entertainment was so rare a thing to the poor queen, that at this declaration, as the cardinal had foreseen, the last trace of her resentment vanished, if not from her heart, at any rate from her countenance. She asked on what day this entertainment was to be given, but the king answered that on that point he must consult the cardinal.

Not a day elapsed, in fact, on which the king did not ask the cardinal when it was to be ; and day by day his eminence deferred it upon some pretext or other. Thus did ten days pass away.

On the eighth day after the scene we have described, the cardinal received a letter dated from London, which contained nothing more than these few lines :

" I have got them, but I am unable to leave London for want of money. Send me five hundred pistoles, and four or five days after having received them I shall be in Paris."

On the very day the cardinal received this letter the king asked the usual question.

Richelieu counted on his fingers, and muttered to himself unheard :

" She will reach Paris, she says, four or five days after the receipt of this money. Four or five days will be required for the money to get there ; four or five days more for her return—that makes ten. Allow for contrary winds and mischances, and the weakness of a woman, and let us fix it at twelve days."

" Well, duke," said the king, " have you calculated ? "

" Yes, sire ; this is the twentieth of September ; the city magistrates give an entertainment on the third of October. That will suit exactly, for you will not have the appearance of humbling yourself to the queen."

Then the cardinal added :

" By the way, sire, do not forget to tell her majesty *the*

evening before the fête, that you wish to see how the diamond studs become her."

CHAPTER XVII.

THE BONANCIEUX HOUSEHOLD.

It was the *second* time the cardinal had recalled the king's attention to these diamond studs. His majesty was struck by this persistence, and supposed that the recommendation had reference to something at present shrouded in mystery.

More than once had his majesty been annoyed that the cardinal's police—which, without having attained the perfection of that of modern times, was nevertheless very good—was better informed than he himself of what was taking place in his own royal household. He hoped, therefore, to glean some information from a conversation with the queen, and then to return to the cardinal, and tell him some secret which his eminence might or might not be acquainted with, but which, in either case, must raise him very much in the eyes of his minister.

He went accordingly to the queen, and, in his habitual way, accosted her with threats against those by whom she was surrounded. The queen bowed her head and allowed the torrent to pass by without reply, hoping that it would at last exhaust itself. But that was not his majesty's design. He wished for a discussion, in which some light or other might break, being convinced that the cardinal had kept something back, and was plotting against him one of those terrible surprises which his eminence so well knew how to contrive. He obtained his object by persevering in his accusations.

"But," said Anne of Austria, wearied of these vague attacks, "but, sire, you do not tell me all that you have in your heart. What have I done? What crime have I committed? It is impossible that your majesty should

make all this disturbance about a letter written to my brother ! "

The king, attacked in such a direct manner himself, did not know how to answer.

He concluded that this was the proper time for the injunction which he had been charged to make on the evening before the entertainment.

" Madame," said he, with dignity, " there will shortly be a ball at the Hôtel de Ville. I desire that, to honor our worthy magistrates, you will be present at it in full dress, and, above all, adorn yourself with those diamond studs I gave you on your birthday. This is my reply."

And terrible the answer was. The queen believed that his majesty knew her secret, and that the cardinal had persuaded him to that long dissimulation of seven or eight days, which, moreover, accorded well with his own character. She became excessively pale ; rested her beautiful hand, which looked then as though it was of wax, upon a bracket ; and gazing at the king with terrified eyes, answered not a word.

" You hear me, madame," said the king, who rather enjoyed her embarrassment, without guessing its cause : " you hear me ? "

" Yes, sire, I hear you," stammered the queen.

" You will be present at this ball ? "

" Yes."

" With your diamond studs ? "

" Yes."

The paleness of the queen, if possible, increased ; the king perceived and revelled in it, with that cold-blooded cruelty which was one of the worst parts of his character.

" It is settled then," said he, " and that is all I had to say to you."

" But on what day will this ball take place ? " asked the queen.

The king instinctively perceived that he ought not to reply to this question, which the queen had put to him in an almost dying voice.

" Almost immediately, madame," said he ; " but I do

not quite remember the date appointed. I will ask the cardinal about it."

"It was the cardinal, then, who suggested this entertainment?" said the queen.

"Yes, madame," said the astonished king; "but what of that?"

"And it was the cardinal who told you to request me to appear in these studs?"

"That is to say, madame——"

"It was he, sire, it was he!"

"Well, what does it signify whether it was the cardinal or myself? Is there any harm in the request?"

"No, sire."

"Then you will attend?"

"Yes, sire."

"Very well," said the king, retiring, "very well; I shall depend upon you."

The queen courtesied, less from etiquette than because her knees bent under her.

His majesty departed, perfectly delighted.

"I am lost," muttered the queen, "lost; for the cardinal evidently knows all, and he it is who pushes forward the king, who, as yet, is in ignorance, but who will soon be made acquainted with the whole. I am lost! My God!"

She knelt down upon a cushion and prayed, with her head buried between her palpitating arms. Her position was, in fact, terrible. Buckingham had returned to London, Madame de Chevreuse was at Tours. More closely watched than ever, the queen painfully felt that one of her ladies had betrayed her, without knowing which. La Porte was unable to leave the Louvre. She had not a soul in the world in whom she could trust.

In the prospect of the ruin overhanging her and the desolation which she experienced, the queen gave way to tears and sobs.

"Cannot I be of any service to your majesty?" said a voice full of gentleness and pity.

The queen turned eagerly, for there could be no de-

ception in the expression of that voice; it was the voice of a friend.

In fact, at one of the doors opening into the queen's apartment appeared pretty Madame Bonancieux. She had been engaged arranging dresses and linen in a wardrobe when the king entered, and, being unable to get out, had heard the whole of the conversation.

The queen uttered a cry at finding herself surprised; for in her agitation she did not recognize the young woman who had been recommended to her by La Porte.

"Oh, do not be afraid," said Madame Bonancieux, joining her hands, and crying herself at the queen's agony. "I am your majesty's slave, in body and in soul; and far as I am below you, inferior as my position is, I believe that I have found a way of relieving your majesty from your difficulty."

"You? oh, Heaven! you?" exclaimed the queen. "But let me see you, let me look you in the face. I am betrayed on all sides; may I confide in you?"

"Oh, madame," said the young woman, falling on her knees, "oh! doubt me not. On my soul, I am ready to die for your majesty!"

This exclamation came from the very depths of the heart, and it was impossible to distrust it.

"Yes," continued Madame Bonancieux, "there are traitors here; but, by the blessed name of the Virgin, I swear to you that there is no one more devoted to your majesty than I am. Those diamond studs that the king has mentioned, you gave to the Duke of Buckingham, did you not? They were in the little rosewood basket which he carried under his arm. Am I mistaken? Is it not so?"

"Oh! my God, my God!" muttered the queen, her teeth chattering with fear.

"Well, these studs," said Madame Bonancieux, "we must get them back again."

"Yes, without doubt we must," said the queen, "but how is it to be done? How can we best succeed?"

"Some one must be sent to the duke."

"But who—who? On whom can I depend?"

"Have confidence in me, madame; do me this honor my queen, and I will find a messenger."

"But it will be necessary to write!"

"Oh, yes, that is indispensable. Two words from your majesty's hand, and under your own private seal."

"But those two words! They will be my condemnation—a divorce! exile!"

"Yes, if they fall into the hands of villains. But I will undertake that these words shall be delivered according to their address."

"Oh! my God! must I then trust my life, my honor, my reputation to your hands?"

"Yes, yes, madame, you *must*, and I will preserve them all."

"But how? Tell me that, at least."

"My husband has been set at liberty these two or three days. I have not yet had time to see him. He is a worthy, honest man, who neither hates nor loves any one. He will do exactly what I tell him, he will set out at my request, without knowing what he carries, and he will deliver your majesty's letter without even knowing it is yours, to the address which it may bear."

The queen seized the young woman's hands with a passionate impulse, looked at her as if to read the depths of her heart, and then, seeing nothing but sincerity in her beautiful eyes, embraced her tenderly.

"Do this," exclaimed she, "and you will have saved my life and my honor!"

"Oh! do not exaggerate the service I have the honor to render you. There is nothing to save, your majesty; you are but the victim, for a time, of treachery."

"It is true, it is true, my child," said the queen; "you are right."

"Give me the letter, then, madame, for the time is short."

The queen ran to a small table, on which were pen, ink, and paper, and wrote two lines, which she sealed with her own seal and handed to Madame Bonancieux.

"And now," said the queen, "we are forgetting one thing, which is very necessary."

"And what is that?"

"Money."

Madame Bonancieux blushed.

"Yes, it is true," said she; "and I will confess to your majesty that my husband——"

"Your husband has none. Is that what you are about to say?"

"Yes, he has money, but he is very avaricious; that is his chief fault. Nevertheless, let not your majesty be uneasy; we will find means."

"And I have none, either" (those who may read the memoirs of Madame de Motteville will not be astonished at this reply)—"yet, stay!"

The queen ran to her jewel box.

"Here," said she; "here is a ring of great value, as I am assured. It was given me by my brother, the king of Spain; it is mine, and I am at liberty to dispose of it. Take this ring, convert it into money, and let your husband set out."

"In one hour you shall be obeyed."

"You see the direction," said the queen, speaking so low that she could scarcely be heard: "*To His Grace the Duke of Buckingham, London.*"

"The letter shall be delivered to himself alone!"

"Generous child!" exclaimed the queen.

Madame Bonancieux kissed the queen's hand, concealed the letter in her bosom, and disappeared with the lightness of a bird.

In ten minutes she was at her own house. As she had told the queen, she had not seen her husband since his liberation and was therefore ignorant of the change which had taken place in him regarding the cardinal—a change which his eminence's flattery and money had effected, and which had been strengthened by two or three visits from Rochefort, who had become Bonancieux's best friend, having persuaded him that the abduction of his wife had proceeded from no

culpable sentiment, but was merely a political precaution.

She found M. Bonancieux alone. The poor man was with great difficulty restoring some order to his house where he had found the furniture almost destroyed and the chests almost empty, justice *not* being one of the three things which King Solomon points out as leaving no traces of their course. As for the servant girl, she had fled on the arrest of her master. Terror had taken such hold of the poor girl that she never ceased walking until she reached her native town in Burgundy.

The worthy mercer had, as soon as he reached home, announced his happy return to his wife, and she had replied by congratulations, and an assurance that the first moment that she could snatch from her duties should be devoted to a visit to him.

This first moment had been five days in arriving, which under other circumstances might have appeared rather long to Master Bonancieux; but he had ample food for reflection in the visits he had paid the cardinal and in those which he had received from Rochefort, and it is well known that nothing makes the time pass so pleasantly as reflection.

And the reflections of Bonancieux were, above all, of a rosy tint. Rochefort called him his good friend, his dear Bonancieux, and did not cease to tell him that the cardinal thought very highly of him. The mercer already saw himself on the high road to fortune and preferment.

On her part, Madame Bonancieux had reflected also, but, it must be confessed, on things quite different from ambition. In spite of all she could do her thoughts would turn toward that handsome young man, who was so brave, and seemed to be so full of love. Married at eighteen and having always lived in the midst of her husband's friends, who were but little calculated to excite the affections of one whose sentiments were more elevated than her situation, Madame Bonancieux had remained insensible to all vulgar impressions.

But at that period more particularly the title of gentleman had great influence over the citizens; and D'Artagnan was a gentleman, and, besides, wore the uniform of the guards, which, next to that of the musketeers, was the most highly appreciated by the fair sex. He was, moreover, young, handsome, and adventurous, and he talked of love like one who loved, and was eager to be loved again. All this was more than enough to turn a heart twenty-three years of age; and Madame Bonancieux had just arrived at that pretty period of a lady's life.

The happy couple, although they had not met for more than eight days, and during that time some grave events had happened, addressed each other with a certain preoccupation of mind. Nevertheless, M. Bonancieux manifested sincere joy and advanced toward his wife with open arms.

Madame Bonancieux offered her forehead to be kissed.

"Let us have a little talk," said she.

"What!" said the astonished Bonancieux.

"Yes, certainly. I have something of the greatest importance to tell you."

"Really! and I have some serious questions to put to you. Explain to me your abduction, I beg of you."

"That is of no consequence just now," said Madame Bonancieux.

"And what is *your* affair of consequence, then? Is it about my imprisonment?"

"I heard of that on the very day; but, as you were guilty of no crime, as you were connected with no intrigue, and as you knew nothing that could compromise you, I attached to that event only the importance it merited."

"You speak of it with misbecoming unconcern, madame," replied Bonancieux, hurt at the slight interest which his wife manifested in him. "Do you not know that I was incarcerated for one day and one night in a dungeon of the Bastile?"

"A day and a night are soon passed. But let us have

done with your captivity, and return to what has brough me here to you."

"What! that which brings you here to me? Then i is not the desire of seeing your husband you have beer separated from for eight days?" demanded the mercer cut to the quick.

"It is that first, and something else afterwards."

"Speak."

"An affair of the greatest importance; on which perhaps, our future fortune may depend."

"Our fortune has a very different look since I saw you last, Madame Bonancieux, and I should not wonder if, some months hence, it should excite the envy o many."

"Yes, particularly if you will follow the instructions which I am about to give you."

"To me?"

"Yes, to you. There is a good and loyal action to b performed, sir, and much money to be gained at th same time."

Madame Bonancieux knew that in speaking to he husband of money, she attacked his weak side. Bu a man—even a mercer—when he has conversed ter minutes with a cardinal, is no longer the same being.

"Much money to be gained?" said Bonancieux, pro truding his lips.

"Yes, a great deal."

"About how much?"

"A thousand pistoles, perhaps."

"Then what you are going to ask of me is of seriou importance?"

"Yes."

"What must I do?"

"You will set out immediately. I will give you paper, which you will not let out of your own possessio under any pretense whatever, and which you will delive to the proper person."

"And where am I to go?"

"To London."

"I go to London! Come, now, you are joking. What business have I in London?"

"But there are others who want you to go there."

"Who are they? I tell you, beforehand, I will do nothing in the dark; and I wish to know, not only to what I expose myself, but also for whom I expose myself."

"An illustrious person sends you, and an illustrious person will receive you; the recompense will surpass your desires, and this is all that I can promise you."

"Intrigues again! nothing but intrigues! Thank you, I am now somewhat distrustful of them; the cardinal has rather enlightened me on that subject."

"The cardinal!" cried Madame Bonancieux; "have you seen the cardinal?"

"He sent for me," proudly answered the mercer.

"And were you imprudent enough to go at his invitation?"

"I ought to say that I had no choice whether I would go or not, for I was taken between two guards. It is true, also, that as I did not then know his eminence, if I could have avoided the visit I should have been delighted."

"And he treated you ill—he threatened you?"

"He gave me his hand and called me his friend," said Bonancieux; "his friend! Do you hear, madame, I am the friend of the great cardinal!"

"Of the great cardinal!"

"But perhaps you do not allow him that title, madame!"

"I dispute nothing; but I tell you that the favor of a minister is ephemeral—that the man is mad who attaches himself to one. There are powers above his which do not rest on the caprice of one man or the issue of any single event, and it is to these powers that one ought to cleave."

"I am very sorry, madame, but I know no other power than that of the great man whom I have the honor to serve."

"You serve the cardinal?"

"Yes, madame; and, as his servant, I will not permi you to engage in plots which compromise the safety c the state, or to assist the intrigues of a woman who i not French, but Spanish, in her soul. Happily, the grea cardinal is there; his vigilant eye penetrates the ver depths of the heart."

Bonancieux was repeating, word for word, a sentenc he had heard from the Count de Rochefort; but th poor woman, who had entirely relied upon her husband and had, in this hope, answered for him to the queer did not the less shudder, both at the danger into whic she had so very nearly plunged herself, and the utte helplessness of her present state. And yet, knowing th weakness and, above all, the avarice of her husband she did not despair of leading him into her measures.

"Ah! you are a cardinalist, sir!" cried she; "aha you serve the man who ill-treats your wife, and insult his queen!"

"The interests of individuals are nothing in com parison to the interests of the state. I am for those wh serve the state!" said Bonancieux, emphatically.

This was another of Rochefort's phrases which h remembered and now made use of at the first oppo tunity.

"And do you know what the state you speak of is?" asked Madame Bonancieux, shrugging her shoulder "Be content to remain an unscheming citizen, and clin to the side which offers you the greatest advantages."

"Ah! ah!" said Bonancieux, striking a bag whos goodly paunch gave out a silvery sound; "what do yo say to this, Mistress Preacher?"

"Where did this money come from?"

"Can't you guess?"

"From the cardinal?"

"From him, and from my friend the Count de Roch fort."

"The Count de Rochefort! Why, that is the man wh carried me off!"

"May be so, madame."

"And can you accept money from such a man?"

"Did you not tell me that this abduction was entirely political?"

"Yes; but then it was designed to make me betray my mistress—to drag from me, by tortures, confessions which might compromise the honor, and perhaps the life, of my august mistress."

"Madame," said Bonancieux, "your august mistress is a perfidious Spaniard, and the cardinal does only what is quite right."

"Sir," said the young woman, "I knew that you were cowardly, avaricious, and imbecile, but I did not know that you were infamous."

"Madame," said Bonancieux, who had never before seen his wife angry, and who recoiled before this conjugal thunder-cloud, "madame, what is all this you are saying?"

"I say you are a wretch!" continued Madame Bonancieux, who saw that she was recovering some influence over her husband. "Ah! you are a politician, and, moreover, a cardinalist politician! Ah! you sell yourself, body and soul, to the devil for gold!"

"No, but to the cardinal."

"It is the same thing," cried the young woman. "He who says Richelieu, says Satan."

"Hold your tongue, madame, hold your tongue—you might be heard."

"Yes, you are right, and I ought to be ashamed of you and of your cowardice!"

"But what do you require of me, then? Let me hear."

"I have told you that you should set off this instant for London, sir, and should loyally and truly perform the commission with which I condescend to intrust you. On this condition I forget and forgive everything; and, what is more," she added, loftily, holding out her hand, "I restore you to my affection."

Bonancieux was a coward and a miser, but he loved his wife, and stood subdued.

A man of fifty cannot long be cross with a woman of three-and-twenty. Madame Bonancieux saw that he hesitated.

"Come," said she, "have you made up your mind?"

"But, my dear woman, reflect a little on what you require of me. London is a long way from Paris—a very long way. And perhaps the business carries certain dangers with it."

"What does that signify, if you escape them?"

"Well, then," said the mercer, "listen, Madame Bonancieux. I flatly refuse. Intrigues appall me. I have already seen the Bastile. Oh! it is frightful, that Bastile! It makes my flesh creep to think of it. I was threatened with the torture. Do you know what the torture is? Wedges of wood, which they drive between your legs till the very bones split. No, decidedly, I will not go. Why the deuce do you not go yourself? for really, I begin to think I must have been mistaken about you until now. I suspect that you are a man, and a very violent one, too."

"And you! you are a woman—a miserable, stupid, soulless woman. What! you are afraid. Well, then, if you do not set out this instant, I will have you arrested by order of the queen, and clapped into that Bastile which you so much dread."

Bonancieux sank into deep consideration. He carefully balanced the two enmities in his brain—that of the cardinal against that of the queen; but the cardinal's preponderated.

"Have me arrested by the queen!" said he; "well I will get myself liberated through his eminence."

Madame Bonancieux saw that she had gone too far this time, and she trembled at her own rashness. She looked with terror for an instant at this stupid figure, as invincible in obstinacy as a fool in fear.

"Well, then," said she, "so let it be. Perhaps, after all, you are right; a man sees further in politics than a woman does, and you more particularly, M. Bonancieux who have chatted with the cardinal. And yet it is very

hard," continued she, "that my husband, that a man on whose affection I thought I could rely, should treat me so unkindly, and not satisfy my whim."

"It is because your whims may lead too far," said Bonancieux, triumphantly, "that I distrust them!"

"I renounce them, then," said the young woman, with a sigh; "let us talk no more about them."

"If you would only tell me what I was to do in London," resumed Bonancieux, who remembered, somewhat too late, that Rochefort had advised him to worm out all his wife's secrets.

"It is unnecessary that you should know it," said the young woman, who was now restrained by an instinctive distrust: "it was about a trifle such as women sigh for —about a purchase by which money might be gained."

But the more the young woman defended herself, the more important did Bonancieux esteem the secret which she refused to confide to him. He determined, therefore, to go immediately to the Count de Rochefort and tell him that the queen was on the lookout for a messenger to send to London.

"Pardon me, if I leave you, my dear Madame Bonancieux," said he, "but not knowing that you were coming to see me, I had made an appointment with one of my friends. I will return directly. If you will only wait half an hour or so for me, as soon as I have done with this friend I will return, and, as it begins to get late, I will accompany you to the Louvre."

"Thanks, sir," said Madame Bonancieux, "you are not brave enough to be of any service whatever to me, and I will return alone to the Louvre."

"As you please, Madame Bonancieux," replied the ex-mercer. "Shall I see you again soon?"

"Certainly. Next week I hope that I may have a little liberty, and I will take advantage of it to come and put our things in order. They must be in a pretty state."

"Very well, I shall expect you. Have you any further commands for me?"

"Me! none in the world."

"Farewell, then, for a short time."

"Farewell."

Bonancieux kissed his wife's hand and hastened away.

"So," said Madame Bonancieux, when her husband had shut the street door, and she found herself alone—"so nothing remained for that fool but to become a cardinalist! And I, who answered for him to the queen—I, who promised my poor mistress—ah! good heavens! she will take me for one of those wretches with which the palace swarms, and who are placed about her as spies. Ah! M. Bonancieux, I never loved you much, but it is worse than that now! I hate you; and on my word of honor, you shall pay for this!"

At the moment she uttered these words a knock on the ceiling made her raise her head, and a voice which came through the floor, called out to her:

"Dear Madame Bonancieux, open the little door in the alley, and I will come down to you."

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE LOVER AND THE HUSBAND.

"Ah, madame," said D'Artagnan, as he entered the door which the young woman opened for him, "allow me to tell you that you have but a sorry husband"

"What! have you heard our conversation?" eagerly demanded Madame Bonancieux, looking anxiously at D'Artagnan.

"Every word of it."

"But, good gracious! how can that be?"

"By a plan of my own, by which I also heard the still more animated conversation you had with the cardinal's underlings."

"And what did you understand from what we said?

"A thousand things. First, that your husband is

happily, a fool and a blockhead; and as you are in great embarrassment, I am heartily glad of it, since it gives me an opportunity of engaging myself in your service; and God knows I am willing to throw myself into the fire for you. Then, that the queen wants some brave, intelligent man to go to London for her. I have, at least, two or three of the qualifications which you require, and—here I am."

Madame Bonancieux did not answer, but her heart beat with joy, and a secret hope sparkled in her eyes.

"And what security will you give me," demanded she, "if I consent to intrust you with this commission?"

"My love for you. Come, speak; command; what is there to be done?"

"Oh! heavens!" sighed the young woman, "ought I to confide such a secret to you, sir? You are almost a boy!"

"Ah! you want some one who will answer for me?"

"I confess that it would give me more confidence."

"Do you know Athos?"

"No."

"Porthos?"

"No."

"Aramis?"

"No. Who are these gentlemen?"

"They belong to the king's musketeers. Do you know M. de Treville, their captain?"

"Yes, him I do know—not personally, but from having heard him spoken of to the queen as a brave and honorable gentleman."

"You would not fear that he would betray you to the cardinal?"

"Certainly not."

"Well, then, reveal to him your secret and ask him whether, however important and precious and terrible it may be, you may not safely intrust it to me."

"But this secret is not mine, and I must not thus disclose it."

"You were going to confide it to M. Bonancieux," said D'Artagnan, with some sharpness.

"As one would trust a letter to a hollow tree, to the wing of a pigeon, or the collar of a dog."

"And yet you see plainly that I love you."

"You *say* so."

"I am an honorable man."

"I believe it."

"I am brave."

"Oh, of that I am *sure*."

"Put me to the proof, then."

Madame Bonancieux gazed at the young man, restrained only by a last lingering hesitation. But there was so much ardor in his eyes, and so much persuasiveness in his voice, that she felt constrained to trust him. Besides, she was in one of those positions in which it is necessary to run great risks for the sake of great results. The queen might be as certainly lost by too much caution, as by too much confidence. We must confess also, that an involuntary sentiment which she experienced for this young protector determined her to speak.

"Listen," said she; "I yield to your protestations and assurances; but I swear to you before God, who hears us, that if you betray me, and my enemies forgive me, I will destroy myself and accuse you of my death."

"And I swear to you, before God, madame," said D'Artagnan, "that if I am seized whilst performing the orders you may give me, I will die sooner than do or say anything to compromise any one."

Then the young woman intrusted him with the terrible secret, part of which had been by chance disclosed to him opposite the Samaritan.

It was a declaration of mutual affection. D'Artagnan glowed with joy and pride. This secret he possessed, this woman whom he loved—such confidence and love made him strong as Hercules.

"I am off," said he, "I am off directly."

"What! you are going! And your regiment? your captain?"

"Upon my life, you made me forget all about them, dear Constance. Yes, you are right; I must get leave of absence."

"Another obstacle!" murmured Madame Bonançieux, sorrowfully.

"Oh," said D'Artagnan, after a moment's reflection, "I shall easily manage that, never fear."

"How so?"

"I will go to M. de Treville this evening, and will request him to ask this favor for me of his brother-in-law, M. des Essarts."

"Now for another thing," said Madame Bonancieux.

"And what is that?" inquired D'Artagnan, seeing that she hesitated.

"Perhaps you have got no money?"

"*Perhaps* is one word too many," said D'Artagnan, with a smile.

"Then," said Madame Bonancieux, opening a chest and taking from it the bag which her husband had so lovingly caressed half an hour before, "take this bag."

"That which belonged to the cardinal!" exclaimed D'Artagnan, with a hearty laugh, since, thanks to the uplifted boards, he had not lost one syllable of the conversation between the mercer and his wife.

"Yes, the cardinal's," replied Madame Bonancieux; "you see that it makes a very respectable appearance."

"Egad!" cried D'Artagnan, "it will be doubly amusing to save the queen with his eminence's money."

"You are an amiable and charming young man," said Madame Bonancieux, "and depend upon it, her majesty will not prove ungrateful."

"Oh, I am abundantly rewarded already," said D'Artagnan. "I love you, and you allow me to tell you so; and even this is more happiness than I had dared to hope for."

"Silence!" said Madame Bonancieux, starting.

"What is the matter?"

"Some one is speaking in the street."

"It is the voice——"

"Of my husband. Yes, I recognize it."

D'Artagnan ran and bolted the door.

"He shall not enter till I am gone," said he; "and when I have left, you will open the door."

"But I ought to be gone too; and the disappearance of this money—how am I to excuse it, if I am here?"

"You are right—we must both go."

"Go? but how? He will see us if we go out."

"Then we must go up to my room."

"Ah!" exclaimed Madame Bonancieux; "you say that in a tone that frightens me."

Madame Bonancieux pronounced these words with tearful eyes. D'Artagnan perceived the tear, and threw himself upon his knees in deep emotion.

"On the word of a gentleman," said he, "in my room you shall be as sacred as in a shrine!"

"Let us go, then, my friend," said she; "I trust in your honor."

D'Artagnan carefully unfastened the bolt, and both light as shadows, glided through the inner door into the court, and noiselessly ascending the stairs, entered D'Artagnan's chamber.

Once in his own room, the young man, for greater security, barricaded the door; and then they both went to the window and through a chink of the shutter saw M. Bonancieux talking to a man in a cloak.

At the sight of the man in the cloak, D'Artagnan made a spring, and partly drawing his sword, rushed toward the door.

It was the man of Meung.

"What are you about to do?" cried Madame Bonancieux; "you will ruin everything."

"But I have sworn to kill that man," said D'Artagnan.

"Your life is at present consecrated and does not belong to you. In the queen's name, I forbid you to throw yourself into any further danger than the journey."

"And in your own name do you enjoin nothing?"

"Yes, in my own name," said Madame Bonancieux

with emotion; "in my own name, I entreat you. But listen: I think they are talking about me."

D'Artagnan approached the window and listened.

M. Bonancieux had opened his door, and finding the room empty, returned to the man in the cloak, whom he had left for an instant alone.

"She is gone," said he; "she must have returned to the Louvre."

"You are quite sure," replied the stranger, "that she had no suspicion of your object in going out?"

"No," said Bonancieux, with much self-complacency; "she is a woman of too superficial an intellect."

"The young guardsman—is he at home?"

"I do not think he *is*. As you may perceive, his shutter is closed, and there is no light in his room."

"Never mind; we had better make certain."

"How so?"

"By rapping at his door."

"I will go and ask his servant."

"Go."

Bonancieux re-entered his room, passed through the very door which had just given egress to the fugitives, ascended to D'Artagnan's landing-place, and knocked.

No one answered. Porthos, in order to make an extra display, had borrowed Planchet for that evening, and as for D'Artagnan, he was careful to give no sign of being there.

At the moment that Bonancieux's knock resounded on the door, the two young people felt the beating of their hearts.

"There is no one at home," said Bonancieux.

"Never mind, let us go into your room, nevertheless; we shall be in greater privacy than at the door."

"Ah! my God!" said Madame Bonancieux, "we shall not hear any more."

"On the contrary," said D'Artagnan, "we shall hear all the better."

D'Artagnan lifted up the three or four boards that made another Dionysius's ear of his chamber, laid a

piece of carpet on the floor, knelt down upon it, an then made a sign to Madame Bonancieux to lean, as h was doing, over the aperture.

"You are sure that there is no one?" said the strange

"I answer for it," said Bonancieux.

"And you think that your wife——"

"Has returned to the Louvre."

"Without speaking to any other person than you self?"

"I am sure of it."

"It is a point of the greatest importance: do yo understand?"

"Then the intelligence I have given you is of son value?"

"Very great, my dear Bonancieux; I will not di guise the fact from such a man as yourself."

"Then the cardinal will be satisfied with me?"

"I do not doubt it."

"The great cardinal!"

"You are quite sure that, in her conversation wi you, your wife mentioned no names?"

"I think not."

"She did not mention either Madame de Chevreus or the Duke of Buckingham, or Madame de Vernet?"

"No, she merely said that she wished to send me London, in the service of an illustrious person."

"The villain! the traitor!" muttered Madame Bona cieux.

"Hush!" said D'Artagnan, taking her hand, which s gave up to him without a thought.

"Never mind," said the man in the cloak, "you are blockhead not to have pretended to accept the comm sion; then you would have had the letter in your p session. The state, which is in danger, would have be saved, and you——"

"And I?"

"Well, and you—the cardinal would have given y letters of nobility."

"Did he tell you so?"

"Yes, I know that he wished to surprise you with them."

"Be easy," replied Bonancieux; "my wife adores me, and there is plenty of time yet."

"The ninny!" whispered Madame Bonancieux.

"Be quiet," said D'Artagnan, pressing her hand more closely.

"What! is there yet time?" said the man in the cloak.

"I will instantly proceed to the Louvre, ask for Madame Bonancieux, say that I have considered the affair, obtain the letter and hasten to the cardinal."

"Well, make haste. I will soon return to know the result of your proceedings."

The stranger then departed.

"The wretch!" said Madame Bonancieux, applying that epithet to her husband.

"Silence," said D'Artagnan, pressing her hand yet more warmly.

A terrible hullaballoo interrupted the reflections of D'Artagnan and Madame Bonancieux.

It was her husband, who had just discovered the loss of his bag and was exclaiming against the robber.

"Oh, my God!" exclaimed Madame Bonancieux, "he will rouse the neighborhood."

Bonancieux continued his outcries for a long time; but as such sounds were of almost daily occurrence, they attracted no attention in the Rue des Fossoyeurs; and as the mercer's house was, moreover, in no very good repute, finding that nobody came to his help, he went out, still uttering his outcries, which they heard gradually dying away in the direction of the Rue du Bac.

"And now that he is gone it is your turn to depart," said Madame Bonancieux. "Be brave, but, above all, be prudent, and remember that you are devoted to the queen."

"To her, and to you!" exclaimed D'Artagnan. "Be assured, beautiful Constance, that I shall return worthy

of her gratitude; but shall I return worthy also o your love ?"

The young woman only replied by the glowing blus that mantled on her cheek. After a few moment D'Artagnan went out, enveloped also in a long cloak cavalierly thrust backward by the sheath of his enor mous sword.

Madame Bonancieux followed him with that long loo of affection a woman fixes on the man she loves; bu as soon as he had turned the corner of the street, sh sank upon her knees, and joining her hands, exclaimed:

"Oh! my God! preserve the queen, and preserv me!"

CHAPTER XIX.

THE PLAN OF CAMPAIGN.

D'ARTAGNAN went straight to M. de Treville. He ha reflected that the cardinal would, in a few minutes, b put upon his guard by that cursed stranger, who ap peared to be his agent, and he very wisely though that there was not a moment to be lost.

The heart of the young man overflowed with joy An adventure was presented to him by which bot gold and glory might be won, and which, for the firs encouragement, brought him into communication wit the woman he adored. This chance thus yielded him at one stroke, more than he had ever dared to solici from Providence.

M. de Treville was in his salon, surrounded by hi usual retinue of gentlemen. D'Artagnan, who wa known as an intimate of the house, went directly t his cabinet, and sent word that he desired to speak t him on business of importance.

He had scarcely been there five minutes before M. d Treville entered. At the first glance, and from the jo which sparkled in D'Artagnan's eyes, the worthy cap

tain at once perceived that something fresh was really on his mind.

On his way D'Artagnan had been considering whether he should confide in M. de Treville, or merely ask for a free leave of absence for a secret expedition. But M. de Treville had always been so kind to him, was so entirely devoted to the king and the queen, and so cordially hated the cardinal, that the young man determined to tell him the entire affair.

"You sent for me, my young friend?" said M. de Treville.

"Yes, sir," said D'Artagnan; "and you will pardon me, I hope, for having disturbed you, when you know the importance of the occasion."

"Speak, then. I am all attention."

"It is nothing less," said D'Artagnan, speaking low, "than that the honor, and perhaps the life of the queen are at stake."

"What are you saying?" said M. de Treville, looking round, to be certain they were alone.

"I say, sir, that chance has made me master of a state secret."

"Which you will guard with your life, I hope, young man."

"But which I must impart to you, sir; for you alone can assist me in the mission which I have just received from her majesty."

"Is this secret your own?"

"No, sir, it is the queen's."

"Are you authorized by the queen to impart this to me?"

"No, sir; for, on the contrary, the most profound secrecy is recommended."

"And why, then, are you about to confide it to me?"

"Because, as I told you, without you I am powerless; and I fear that you will refuse me the favor I am here to ask, unless you know the object for which it is solicited."

"Keep your secret, young man, and tell me what yo want."

"I wish you to obtain for me, from M. des Essarts, leave of absence of fifteen days."

"When?"

"This very night."

"Do you leave Paris?"

"I go on a mission.'

"Can you tell me where?"

"To London."

"Has any one an interest in preventing the succes of your design?"

"The cardinal, I believe, would give the world t prevent it!"

"And do you go alone?"

"Yes."

"In that case you must not pass through Bondy. is I who tell you so, on the word of Treville."

"And why so?"

"You will be assassinated."

"I shall die doing my duty."

"But your mission will absolutely fail!"

"That is true," said D'Artagnan.

"Believe me," said M. de Treville, "in every ente prise of this kind there ought to be four at least, order that one may succeed."

"Ah! sir, you are right," said D'Artagnan; "b you know Athos, Porthos, and Aramis, and you ca judge whether I may make use of them."

"Without imparting to them the secret, which should rather not know?"

"We have sworn to one another, once for all, a blin confidence and a devotion proof against all trials; b sides, you can tell them that you have the fullest co fidence in me, and they will not be more incredulo than yourself."

"I can give each of them a leave of absence for fifte days, and that is all: to Athos, who still suffers fro his wound, to go to the waters of Forges; and to Po

thos and Aramis, to follow their friend, whom they do not wish to abandon in his melancholy condition. My sending their leave will be a proof that I authorize the expedition."

"Thank you—a thousand thanks, captain, for your great kindness!"

"Go and find them, then, immediately; and let everything be settled this very night. But, first, write me your request to M. des Essarts. Perhaps you had a spy at your heels, and your visit, which is in that case already known to the cardinal, will be thus accounted for."

D'Artagnan wrote his request in form; and M. de Treville, as he received it from him, assured him that before two in the morning the four furloughs should be at the respective homes of the travelers.

"Have the goodness to send mine to the lodgings of Athos," said D'Artagnan. "I should be afraid of some disagreeable encounter if I returned to my own home again."

"Don't be uneasy. Farewell, and a good journey to you," said M. de Treville; "but,' added he, recalling him, "apropos——"

D'Artagnan returned.

"Have you got any money?"

D'Artagnan shook the bag which he had in his pocket.

"Have you enough?" said M. de Treville.

"Three hundred pistoles."

"That will do; you could reach the end of the world with that."

D'Artagnan bowed to M. de Treville, and pressed the hand which he offered him with respect, mingled with gratitude. From the time of his arrival in Paris this excellent man had been uniformly entitled to his highest esteem; he had found him always consistent, honorable and kind.

His first visit was to Aramis. He had not been to his friend's lodgings since the evening he followed Madame Bonancieux, and, what is more, had scarcely seen him

since ; but every time he met him he fancied he saw corroding sorrow stamped upon his countenance.

This evening, also, Aramis was dull and dreamy D'Artagnan put some questions to him concerning th continued melancholy, but Aramis imputed it to a con mentary on the eighteenth chapter of St. Augustin which he was forced to write in Latin, by the followin week, and which greatly exercised his mind.

When the two friends had been talking some time servant of M. de Treville brought a sealed packet.

" What is that ? " demanded Aramis.

" The leave of absence which monsieur has demanded replied the servant.

" Me ? I have demanded no leave."

" Hold your tongue and take it," said D'Artagna " And here, my friend, is half a pistole for your troubl you will tell M. de Treville that M. Aramis very sincere thanks him. Go."

The servant bowed to the ground and left the room.

" What does all this mean ? " inquired Aramis.

" Take what you may want for a fifteen days' journe and follow me."

" But I cannot leave Paris, at present, without kno ing——"

Aramis stopped himself.

" What has become of *her*, you mean ? " continu D'Artagnan.

" Who ? " resumed Aramis.

" The lady who was here—the lady with the embr dered handkerchief."

" Who told you there was a lady here ? " falte Aramis, becoming as pale as death.

" I saw her."

" And do you know who she is ? "

" I think I can guess."

" Listen," said Aramis ; " since you know so ma things, do you know what has become of this lady ? "

" I presume that she has returned to Tours."

" To Tours ? Yes, that is it ; you evidently kn

her. But how is it that she returned to Tours without saying anything to me about it ? "

" Because she was in fear of being arrested."

" Why did she not write to me ? "

" Because she was afraid of compromising you."

" D'Artagnan, you give me new life ! " cried Aramis. " I believed that I was despised—deceived. I was so happy to see her again ! I could not believe that she had hazarded her liberty to see me, and yet for what else could she have returned to Paris ? "

" For the same cause which this day obliges us to go to England."

" And what is that cause ? " demanded Aramis.

" You shall know it some day, Aramis, but for the present I will imitate the reserve of *the doctor's niece !* "

Aramis smiled, for he remembered the tale he had told his friends on a certain evening.

" Well, then, since she has left Paris—and you are sure of it, D'Artagnan—nothing more detains me here, and I am ready to follow you. You say we are going——"

" To Athos at present, and, if you wish to come, I beg you will make haste, for we have already lost much time. Apropos, tell Bazin."

" Does Bazin go with us ? " inquired Aramis.

" Perhaps so. But at any rate it is better that he should follow us to Athos."

Aramis called Bazin, and after having told him to come to them at Athos's :

" Let us go, then," said he, taking his cloak, his sword, his pistols, and fruitlessly opening three or four drawers in hopes of finding a few stray pistoles. Then, when he was quite satisfied that this search was superfluous, he followed D'Artagnan, wondering how it came about that the young guardsman knew, as well as he did, who the lady was to whom he had afforded hospitality, and better than he did where she was now gone.

Just as they were going out Aramis laid his hand on D'Artagnan's arm, and looked earnestly at him.

"You have not spoken to any one about this lady?" said he.

"To no one in the world."

"Not even to Porthos and Athos?"

"I have not breathed a syllable to them about it."

"That's right."

Satisfied on that important point, Aramis went on his way with D'Artagnan, and they both soon reached Athos's lodgings.

They found him holding his leave of absence in one hand and M. de Treville's letter in the other.

"Can you explain to me," said he, "what these papers mean that I have just received?

"'My dear Athos,—I greatly wish, as your health absolutely requires it, that you should have an opportunity of rest for fifteen days. Go, therefore, and take the waters of Forges, or any others which may agree with you, and get well quickly. Yours affectionately,

'Treville.'"

"Well," said D'Artagnan, "the leave and the letter mean that you must follow me."

"To the waters of Forges?"

"There or elsewhere."

"On the king's service?"

"The king's or the queen's. Are we not the servants of their majesties?"

At this moment Porthos entered.

"Egad!" said he, "here's a very strange thing. Since when have they granted leave to musketeers without their asking for it?"

"Ever since they have had friends who ask instead of them," said D'Artagnan.

"Ah! ah!" said Porthos, "there is something fresh in the wind."

"Yes, we are off," said Aramis.

"To what country?" demanded Porthos.

"Upon my word, I do not know much about it," said Athos; "ask D'Artagnan."

"To London, gentlemen," said D'Artagnan.

"To London!" said Porthos; "and what are you going to do there?"

"Ah! that is what I cannot tell you, gentlemen; you must trust all to me."

"But to go to London money is necessary, and I have none," said Porthos.

"Nor I," said Aramis.

"Nor I," said Athos.

"I have," said D'Artagnan, drawing his treasure out of his pocket and laying it on the table. "In that bag repose three hundred pistoles; let each of us take seventy-five, which is quite enough to go to London and to return. Besides, be easy; we shall not all reach London."

"And why not?"

"Because, according to all probability, some of us will be left on the road."

"Is it a campaign, then, that we are about to undertake?"

"Yes, and a most dangerous one, I forewarn you."

"Ah! but since we risk our lives, I at least would rather know why we do so," said Porthos.

"That will do you a wonderful deal of good," replied Athos.

"Nevertheless," said Aramis, "I am of the same opinion as Porthos."

"Pray," said D'Artagnan, "does the king usually give you his reasons? He tells you bluntly,—'Gentlemen, they are fighting in Gascony, or in Flanders; go and fight.' And you go. As for reasons—you do not trouble your heads about them."

"D'Artagnan is right.' said Athos. "Behold our three leaves of absence which came from M. de Treville, and here are three hundred pistoles which came from I know not where. Let us go and be killed where we are sent. Is life worth so many questions? D'Artagnan, I am ready to follow you."

"And I also," said Porthos.

"And I also," said Aramis. "I shall not be sorr to leave Paris, after all. I want a little amusement t relieve my mind."

"Well, and you will have quite enough to occup your minds, gentlemen, depend upon it," said D'Artagnai

'And now, when must we set off?" inquired Athos.

"Directly," said D'Artagnan; "not a minute mus be lost."

"Halloo, Grimaud, Planchet, Musqueton, Bazin! bawled out the four young men, calling their serv ants; "grease our boots and fetch our horses from th hotel."

In fact, each musketeer left at the general hotel, as a a barrack, his own horse and that of his servant.

Planchet, Musqueton, Grimaud, and Bazin departed i the utmost haste.

"Now, let us arrange the plan of campaign," sai Porthos. "Where are we to go first?"

"To Calais," said D'Artagnan; "it is the most direc line to London."

"Well," said Porthos, "my advice is as follows."

"Speak."

"Four men travelling together will be suspecte D'Artagnan must therefore give his instructions to eac of us. I will go first by way of Bologne, to clear th road; Athos shall set out two hours after by that c Amiens; Aramis will follow us by that of Noyon; an as for D'Artagnan, he will travel by that which h likes best, in Planchet's clothes; whilst Planchet himse shall follow in the uniform of the guards, to pass fo D'Artagnan."

"Gentlemen," said Athos, "my advice is, not to mi up the servants in an affair of this kind; a secret ma *perhaps*, be betrayed by gentlemen; but it is almos *sure* to be sold by servants."

"The plan of Porthos appears to me impracticable, said D'Artagnan, "as I do not myself know what in structions I could give you. I am the bearer of a lette —that is all. I have not, and I cannot make thre

copies of this letter, since it is sealed. We must, therefore, in my opinion, travel in company. It is here in this pocket;" and he pointed out the pocket which contained the letter. "If I am killed one of you will take it and continue the journey; if he is killed it will be another's turn, and so on. Provided only one should arrive, it is all that is necessary."

"Bravo, D'Artagnan, your advice is also mine," said Athos. "Nevertheless, we must be consistent. I am going to take the waters and you will accompany me: but instead of going to Forges I am going to the seaside; I may do which I like. If anybody wants to arrest me I show M. de Treville's letter, and you will show your leave of absence; if they attack us, we will defend ourselves; if they seek to examine us we must maintain sharply that we had no other intention than to take a certain number of dips in salt water. They would have too easy a conquest over four separate men, whilst four men united make a troop. We will arm our four servants with musquetoons and pistols, and if they send an army against us, we will give battle, and the survivor, as D'Artagnan has said, will deliver the letter."

"Well done," said Aramis; "you do not speak often, Athos, but when you do speak, it is St. John of the golden mouth. I adopt the plan of Athos."

"And you, Porthos?"

"And I also," said Porthos, "if it suits D'Artagnan. As the bearer of the letter, he is naturally the leader of the enterprise. Let him decide, and we will obey."

"Well, then," said D'Artagnan, "I decide that we adopt the plan of Athos, and that we set out in half an hour."

"Agreed!" exclaimed the three musketeers in chorus.

And each, plunging his hand into the bag, took from it seventy-five pistoles and made his preparations to depart at the appointed minute.

CHAPTER XX.

THE JOURNEY.

At two o'clock in the morning our four adventurer left Paris, by the barrier St. Denis. Whilst the darkness lasted they continued silent. In spite of themselves they felt the influence of the obscurity and suspected an ambuscade at every step.

With the first streak of day, their tongues becam unbound, and gayety returned with the sun. They fe as on the eve of battle, the heart beat and the eye sparkled; and they recognised that the life which the were, perhaps, about to leave, was, after all, a pleasar and a precious thing.

The appearance of the cavalcade was of the mos formidable character: the black horses of the mus keteers, their martial bearing, and that military custo which made these noble chargers march in rank, wer all indications of their calling, which would have b trayed them through the most elaborate disguises.

The valets followed, armed to the teeth.

All went well as far as Chantilly, where they arrive at about eight in the morning and where they halte for breakfast. They dismounted at a tavern which wa recommended by the sign of St. Martin giving half h cloak to a beggar. They ordered their servants not t unsaddle their horses and to be ready to depart at moment's notice.

They entered the common room of the inn, and seate themselves at table. A gentleman, who had arrived b the Dammartin road, was seated at the table, breal fasting. He entered into conversation concerning th rain and the fine weather. The travelers replied; h drank to their healths, and they returned the compl ment. But at the moment when Musqueton came t announce that the horses were ready and as they aro from the table, the stranger proposed to Porthos t drink the cardinal's health. Porthos replied that h

lesired nothing better, provided the stranger would in urn drink the health of the king. The stranger ex- laimed that he knew no other king than his eminence.)n this Porthos called him a drunken fellow and the tranger drew his sword.

" You have done a foolish thing," said Athos, " but ıever mind, you cannot draw back now ; kill the man, ınd come after us as fast as you can."

All three mounted their horses and departed at full peed, whilst Porthos promised his adversary to per- orate him with all the thrusts known in the fencing chools.

" There's an end of one," said Athos, after they had raveled about five hundred paces.

" But why did that man attack Porthos rather than he others ? " said Aramis.

" Because from Porthos speaking louder than the est of us, he took him for the leader of the party," aid D'Artagnan.

" I always said," muttered Athos, " that the Gascon outh was a well of wisdom."

The travelers proceeded on their way.

At Beauvais they stopped two hours, partly to breathe heir horses, and partly to wait for Porthos. At the nd of that time, as neither Porthos, nor any intelligence f him, arrived, they resumed their journey.

About a league from Beauvais, at a point where the vay narrowed between two banks, they met eight or en men, who, taking advantage of the road being un- aved at this place seemed to be engaged in digging oles and making muddy ruts.

Aramis, fearing to dirty his boots in this artificial lough, apostrophized them rudely. Athos wished to estrain him, but it was too late. The workmen began o rail at the travelers, and, by their insolence, ruffled ne temper of even the cool Athos, who urged his horse gainst one of them.

At this aggression each of these men drew back to the itch and took from it a concealed musket. The result

was that our seven travelers were literally riddled w shot. Aramis received a ball through the shoulder a Musqueton another in the fleshy part of the back, bel the loins. But Musqueton alone fell from his hors not that he was seriously wounded, but, as he could n see his wound, he no doubt thought it far more dang ous than it really was.

"This is an ambuscade," said D'Artagnan; "let not burn good powder, but away."

Aramis, wounded as he was, seized the mane of l horse, which carried him off with the others. That Musqueton had rejoined them and galloped without rider by their side.

"That will give us a spare horse," said Athos.

"I should much prefer a hat," said D'Artagnan, " mine has been carried off by a ball. It is very luck faith, that the letter was not inside it."

"Ah! but they will kill poor Porthos when he com up," said Aramis.

"If Porthos were upon his legs he would have j joined us ere this," said Athos. "It is my opinion th in the heat of the fight the drunkard grew sober."

They galloped on for two more hours, although t horses were so fatigued that it was to be feared th would break down on the way.

The travelers had taken a cross-road, hoping there to be less molested; but at Crevecœur Aramis declar that he could go no further. In fact, it had requir all the courage which he concealed beneath his elega form and polished manners to proceed so far. At ea movement he grew paler, and they were at last oblig to support him on his horse. Putting him down at t door of a wine-shop, and leaving with him Bazin, w was more hindrance than help in a skirmish, they set again, in hopes of reaching Amiens to sleep.

"Zounds!" said Athos, when they found themsel once more upon the way, reduced to two masters, wi Grimaud and Planchet. "Zounds! I will be their du no more. I promise you that they shall not make n

pen my mouth or draw my sword between here and Calais. I swear——"

"Don't swear," said D'Artagnan, "but gallop; that is, if our horses will stand it."

And the travelers dug their spurs into the flanks of their horses, which, thus urged, recovered some degree of strength. They reached Amiens at midnight and dismounted at the sign of the Golden Lily.

The innkeeper had the look of the most genial host in the world. He received the travelers with a candlestick in one hand and a cotton nightcap in the other. He wished to lodge the two travelers, each in a charming chamber; but, unfortunately, these two chambers were at the opposite extremities of the hotel. D'Artagnan and Athos declined them. The host objected that he had no others worthy of their excellencies, but they declared that they would rather sleep in the common room on mattresses, upon the floor. The host insisted, but the travelers were obstinate and carried their point.

They had arranged their beds and fastened the door when some one knocked upon the shutters. They inquired who was there, and on recognizing the voices of their servants opened the window. It was Planchet and Grimaud.

"Grimaud will be sufficient to guard the horses," said Planchet, "and if the gentlemen like, I will sleep across the doorway, by which means no one will be able to get at them."

"And on what will you sleep?" asked D'Artagnan.

"Here is my bed," replied Planchet, strewing a bundle of straw.

"Come, then," said D'Artagnan, "you are quite right; the countenance of our host does not at all please me—it is too polite."

"It affects me the same way," said Athos.

Planchet got in at the window and laid himself across the doorway, whilst Grimaud shut himself up in the stable, promising that at five in the morning he and the four horses would be ready.

The night passed quickly enough. Some one a tempted, about two o'clock, to open the door; but Planchet awoke with a start and cried out, "Who there?" he was answered that it was a mistake, an the footsteps retreated.

At four in the morning a great noise was heard fro the stables. Grimaud had endeavored to awaken t hostlers and they had made an attack upon him. Whe the window was opened they saw the poor fellow lyin senseless, with his head split open by the blow of broom handle.

Planchet went out into the courtyard and wanted t saddle the horses, but they were completely foundere That of Musqueton, which had traveled for five or si hours without a rider the evening before, might hav continued its journey; but, by an inconceivable mistak the veterinary surgeon whom they had brought, as appeared, to bleed the landlord's horse, had bled that Musqueton.

This began to be vexatious. All these successiv accidents were perhaps the result of chance, but the might also be the effect of design. Athos and D'Artagna stepped out whilst Planchet went to inquire whethe there were three horses to be sold in the neighborhoo At the door stood two horses, ready saddled, fresh an vigorous. This was just the thing. He asked wher their masters were, and was informed that they ha passed the night there, and were now paying their bill.

Athos went down to settle their own account, whils D'Artagnan and Planchet remained at the door. Th innkeeper was in a distant lower room, which Atho was requested to enter.

Athos went in without distrust, and took out tw pistoles to pay. The host was alone and seated at hi desk, one of the drawers of which was partly open. H took the money Athos gave him, turned it over in hi hands, and suddenly exclaiming that the pieces wer bad, declared that he would have him and his companion arrested as passers of false money.

"You rascal!" said Athos, as he went towards him, "I will cut off your ears."

But the host stooped down, and taking two pistols from the drawer, aimed them at Athos, vociferating at the same time for help.

At that very moment four men, armed to the teeth, rushed in through the side doors and fell upon Athos.

"I am seized!" cried Athos, with the utmost strength of his lungs: "away with you, D'Artagnan! spur on! spur on!" and he fired off two pistols.

D'Artagnan and Planchet did not wait to be twice warned. They unfastened the two horses which were standing at the door, jumped upon them, dug the spurs into their sides and went off at full gallop.

"Do you know what has become of Athos?" asked D'Artagnan, as they hurried on.

"Oh, sir," said Planchet, "I saw two men fall at his two shots, and it seemed to me, through the window, as if he were working away at the others with his sword."

"Brave Athos!" ejaculated D'Artagnan. "And then to feel that I must abandon you! Well, the same thing awaits us, perhaps, a thousand paces hence. Forward, Planchet, forward! You are a brave fellow."

"I told you so, sir," replied Planchet; "the Picards are only known by being used. Besides, I am in my own country here and that nerves me."

And both of them, spurring on as fast as possible, arrived at St. Omer without a moment's stay. At St. Omer they breathed their horses, with their bridles hanging on their arms for fear of accident, and ate a morsel standing in the street, after which they again set off.

At a hundred paces from the gate of Calais D'Artagnan's horse fell and could by no means be got up again. The blood gushed from his eyes and nose. That of Planchet still remained, but it had come to a halt, and nothing could induce the nag to continue its exertions.

Fortunately, as we have said, they were only a hundred paces from the town. They therefore left the two

steeds upon the highroad and ran to the harbor. Planchet made his master remark a gentleman who had just arrived with his servant and was not above fifty yards before them.

They hastily drew near this gentleman, who appeared to be exceedingly busy. His boots were covered with dust, and he inquired whether he could not take ship to England within the hour.

"Nothing could be more easy," replied the master of a vessel then ready for sailing, "but an order arrived this morning to let no one leave without permission from the cardinal."

"I have that permission," said the gentleman, drawing a paper from his pocket; "here it is."

"Get it countersigned by the governor of the port," said the master of the vessel, "and give me the first chance."

"Where shall I find the governor?"

"At his country house."

"And his country house is situated——"

"At a quarter of a league from the town; see, you may distinguish it from here—the slated roof at the foot of yonder little hill."

"Very well," said the gentleman, and followed by his servant, he took the road to the governor's country house.

D'Artagnan and Planchet followed him, at a distance of five hundred yards.

Once beyond the town D'Artagnan hurried onward and joined the gentleman as he entered a small wood.

"Sir," said D'Artagnan, "you appear in particular haste!"

"No one can be more so, sir."

"I am very sorry for it," said D'Artagnan, "for, as I am in a hurry, also, I want you to render me a service."

"What is it?"

"To let me pass the straits before you."

"Impossible!" said the gentleman. "I have done sixty leagues in forty-four hours, and I must be in London by noon to-morrow."

"And I," said D'Artagnan, "have gone the same distance in forty hours, and must be in London by ten o'clock to-morrow."

"I am sorry, sir, but I am here first, and will not go over second."

"I am sorry, also, sir," said D'Artagnan, "but I am here second, and mean to go over first."

"I am on the king's service!" said the gentleman.

"I am on my own service!" replied D'Artagnan, coolly.

"But it seems to me that this is an ill-timed quarrel which you are seeking to fix on me!"

"Zounds! what would you have?"

"What do you want?"

"Do you want to know?"

"Certainly."

"Very well! I want the order that you have in your pocket, as I have none and must have one."

"I presume you are joking."

"I never joke!"

"Let me pass, sir."

"You shall not pass."

"My brave young man, I will blow your brains out. Halloo! Lubin, my pistols!"

"Planchet," said D'Artagnan, "take care of the man —I will manage the master."

Planchet, encouraged by what had already happened, rushed upon Lubin, and, as he was strong and vigorous, laid him on his back and put his knee upon his breast.

"Arrange your business, sir," said Planchet to his master, "I have settled mine."

Seeing this, the gentleman drew his sword and fell on D'Artagnan, but he had to do with a master hand.

In three seconds D'Artagnan gave him three wounds, saying at each thrust,—

"One for Athos, one for Porthos, and one for Aramis."

At the third stroke the gentleman fell like a clod.

D'Artagnan thought he was dead, or at least that he had fainted, and approached him to seize the order, but at

the moment that he stretched out his hand to feel i it, the wounded man, who had not dropped his swor stabbed him with it on the chest, saying,—

" One for you ! "

" And one *more* for you, and the best of all ! " cri D'Artagnan, furiously pinning him to the earth.

This time the gentleman closed his eyes and fainted.

D'Artagnan felt in the pocket where he had seen hi place the order for his passage, and took it. It was the name of the Count de Wardes.

Then, throwing a last glance on the handsome youn man, who was scarcely twenty-five years old and who he left lying there senseless, perhaps dead, he breath a sigh at the strange destiny which leads men to destro each other for the interests of those they scarcely kno and who often are not even aware of their existence.

But he was soon disturbed in these reflections by Lubi who was howling and crying for aid with all his might

Planchet put his hand upon his throat and squeezed as hard as he could.

" Sir," said he, " as long as I hold him so, he will n cry out ; but the moment I let go, he will begin agai I can see he is a Norman, and the Normans are co foundedly obstinate."

In fact, squeezed as he was, Lubin still endeavored sound his pipes.

" Stop ! " said D'Artagnan ; and taking his han kerchief, he gagged him.

" Now," said Planchet, " let us bind him to a tree."

The thing was properly done. They placed the cou near his servant ; and as the night began to fall, and both the bound man and the wounded one were son paces in the wood, it was clear that they must rema there till the next morning.

" And, now," said D'Artagnan, " for the governor."

" You are wounded, I fear ? " said Planchet.

" It is nothing. Let us now think of what is of t most consequence ; we can attend to my wound afte wards. Besides, it does not seem to me to be dangerous

And they both proceeded with prodigious strides towards the country house of the worthy functionary.

The Count de Wardes was announced.

D'Artagnan was introduced.

"Have you an order signed by the cardinal?" asked the governor.

"Yes, sir," said D'Artagnan; "here it is."

"Ah! it is all right, and well recommended," said the governor.

"That is quite natural," answered D'Artagnan. "I am one of his most faithful servants."

"It appears that his eminence wishes to hinder some one from reaching England."

"Yes, a certain D'Artagnan, a Béarnese gentleman, who left Paris with three of his friends, intending to go to London."

"Do you know him personally?" inquired the governor.

"Whom do you mean?"

"This D'Artagnan."

"Particularly well."

"Give me a description of him, then."

"Nothing is easier."

And then D'Artagnan gave, feature for feature, the exact description of the Count de Wardes.

"Has he any attendant?" demanded the governor.

"Yes, a servant named Lubin."

"We will watch for them, and if we can lay hands upon them, his eminence may be assured that they shall be sent back to Paris under a sufficient escort."

"In doing so, sir," said D'Artagnan, "you will merit the gratitude of the cardinal."

"Shall you see him on your return, count?"

"Without doubt."

"Tell him, I beseech you," said the governor, "that I am his most humble servant."

"I will not fail to do so."

Delighted by this assurance, the governor countersigned the order and returned it to D'Artagnan, who

lost no time in useless compliments, but bowing to th governor and thanking him, took his leave immediately.

Once out of the house they took a circuitous path to avoid the wood, and entered the town by another gate.

The bark was still ready to sail and the master waited on the quay.

"Well!" said he, seeing D'Artagnan.

"Here is my pass, countersigned."

"And the other gentleman?"

"He will not go over to-day," said D'Artagnan; "but make yourself easy, I will pay for the passage of both."

"In that case let's be off," said the master.

"Away, then!" cried D'Artagnan; and he and Planchet springing into the jolly-boat, in five minutes they were on board the vessel.

It was full time, for when they were half a league out at sea D'Artagnan saw a bright light and heard an explosion; it was the sound of the cannon that announced the closing of the port.

It was now time to think about his wound. Happily it was, as D'Artagnan had supposed, not at all dangerous; the point of the sword had struck against a rib and glanced along the bone, and as the shirt had stuck to the wound at once, hardly a drop of blood had flowed.

D'Artagnan was overpowered with fatigue, and a mattress being spread for him on the deck, he threw himself upon it and slept.

The next morning, at break of day, he found himself not less than three or four leagues from the shores of England; the wind had been gentle during the night and they had made but little progress.

At two o'clock they cast anchor at Dover, and at half past two D'Artagnan landed in England, exclaiming,—

"Here I am, at last!"

But this was not enough, he must get on to London. In England posting was pretty well established. D'Artagnan and Planchet took each a post-horse; a postilion galloped before them and in a few hours they reached the gates of London.

The duke was hunting at Windsor with the king.

D'Artagnan knew nothing of London, he knew not one word of English; but he wrote the word Buckingham on a piece of paper, and every one he met was able to direct him to the palace of the duke.

D'Artagnan inquired for the duke's confidential valet, who, having accompanied him in all his journeys, spoke French perfectly, and told him he came from Paris on an affair of life and death and that he must speak with his master without an instant's delay.

The confidence with which D'Artagnan spoke satisfied Patrice (for that was the name of the minister's man). He ordered two horses to be saddled and took upon himself the charge of accompanying the young guardsman. As for poor Planchet, they had taken him off his horse as stiff as a stake. The poor fellow was quite exhausted, but D'Artagnan seemed to be made of iron.

They reached Windsor Castle, where they learned that the king and the duke were out hawking in the marshes, some two or three miles off.

In twenty minutes they reached the place. Patrice heard his master's voice, calling his hawk.

"Whom shall I announce to my lord?" said Patrice.

"The young man," said D'Artagnan, "who sought a quarrel with him one evening on the Pont Neuf, opposite the Samaritaine."

"A singular recommendation," said Patrice.

"You will see that it is as good a one as possibly could be."

Patrice gave his horse the rein, reached the duke, and told him, in the very words we have just cited, that a messenger awaited him.

Buckingham at once recollected D'Artagnan, and fearing that something had happened in France of which information had been sent to him, he only gave himself time to ask where the messenger was; and having recognized the uniform of the guards at that distance, he rode at full speed straight up to D'Artagnan. Patrice judiciously kept himself at a distance.

"No misfortune has befallen the queen?" cried Buc ingham.

"I think not, sir, but I believe that she is in gre danger, from which your grace alone can rescue her."

"I!" said Buckingham; "and how shall I be su ciently happy to render her any service? Spea Speak!"

"Take this letter," said D'Artagnan.

"This letter! and from whom comes this letter?"

"From her majesty, I believe."

"From her majesty!" said Buckingham, growing pale that D'Artagnan thought he was about to fall.

And he broke the seal.

"How has the letter got torn?" asked he, showi D'Artagnan a place where it was pierced through.

"Ah!" said D'Artagnan, "I did not perceive before; it is the sword of the Count de Wardes, wh must have done that when it was boring a hole in chest."

"Are you wounded?" inquired Buckingham.

"Oh! a mere trifle," said D'Artagnan, "a m scratch."

"Just Heaven! what have I read?" exclaimed Bu ingham. "Patrice, remain here—or, rather, find king, wherever he may be; tell his majesty tha humbly beseech him to excuse me, but that an affai the very greatest importance calls me to London. Co with me, my friend—come on."

And they flew towards the capital at full gallop.

CHAPTER XXI.

THE COUNTESS DE WINTER.

As they hurried on the duke heard from D'Artagnan really all that had occurred, but all that D'Artagnan himself acquainted with. By putting together what

rom the lips of the young man and what was supplied y his own recollections, he was enabled to form a retty accurate idea of the seriousness of the position, f which the queen's letter, short as it was, afforded bundant proof. But what most astonished him was, hat the cardinal, interested as he was that this youth hould not set foot in England, had not contrived to op him on his way. It was then, and on the expres- on of this astonishment, that D'Artagnan related to im the precautions which had been taken, and how, hanks to the devotion of his three friends, whom he ad left bleeding here and there along the road, he had anaged to get off with merely the wound which had ierced the queen's letter, and which he had so terribly paid to M. de Wardes. Whilst listening to this account, ven with the greatest simplicity, the duke looked from me to time on the young man with astonishment, as he could not comprehend how so much prudence, ourage, and devotion could be associated with a counte- ance which hardly showed the traces yet of twenty ears.

Their horses went like the wind and they were soon at e gates of London. D'Artagnan had supposed that, n entering the town, the duke would slacken his pace ; it it was not so ; he continued his course at the same te, caring little for upsetting those who were in his way. fact, in passing through the city, two or three acci- nts of this kind happened ; but Buckingham did not en turn his head to see what had become of those he d knocked over. D'Artagnan followed him in the idst of cries which sounded very much like maledic- ons.

On entering the courtyard of his mansion, Buckingham mped off his horse and, without caring what became him, threw the bridle over its neck, and rushed toward e steps. D'Artagnan did the same, with somewhat ore attention, nevertheless, to these noble animals, hose merits he appreciated ; but he had the satisfac- n of seeing three or four servants hurrying from the

kitchen and stables and taking charge of the horse
The duke walked so quickly that D'Artagnan had som
difficulty in following him. He passed through man
salons, magnificent to a degree of which the most di
tinguished nobles of France had not even an idea, an
came at last to a bed-chamber, which was at once
miracle of taste and splendor. In an alcove of th
chamber there was a door in the tapestry, which th
duke opened with a small golden key that he carrie
suspended at his neck by a chain of the same meta
Out of politeness D'Artagnan remained behind; but a
the moment that Buckingham stepped over the thresho
of this door, he turned, and perceiving the young man
hesitation,—

"Come," said he, "and if you ever have the happine
of being admitted into the presence of the queen
France, tell her what you beheld."

Encouraged by this invitation, D'Artagnan followe
the duke, who closed the door behind him.

They found themselves in a small chapel, splendidl
illuminated by a profusion of wax lights, and covere
with Persian silk carpets, embroidered with gold. Abo
a kind of altar and under a dais of blue velvet, su
mounted by red and white plumes, was a portrait,
the size of life, representing Anne of Austria, and
perfectly resembling her that D'Artagnan uttered a c
of surprise on seeing it; one would have believed t
queen was just about to speak.

On the altar, beneath the portrait, stood the cask
that contained the diamond studs.

The duke approached the altar, and kneeling as
priest might do before the cross, he opened the casket.

"Here," said he, drawing from the casket a large pie
of blue ribbon, alive and glittering with diamond
"here are those precious studs, wearing which I h
made an oath to be buried. The queen gave them
me, she now takes them back; her commands, like tho
of Heaven, shall be obeyed in everything."

Then he began to kiss, one by one, the diamonds fro

which he was about to part; but suddenly he uttered a terrible cry.

"What is the matter?" demanded D'Artagnan, in alarm; "what has befallen you, my lord?"

"All is lost!" groaned Buckingham, becoming as pale as death, "two of the studs are missing; there are but ten left."

"Has your grace lost them, or do you suppose they have been stolen?"

"Some one has stolen them," replied the duke, "and it is the cardinal who has managed it. See, the ribbons which held them have been cut with scissors."

"Has your grace any suspicion who has committed the theft? Perhaps the robber has them still."

"Stop, stop!" said the duke, "the only time I have worn these studs was at a ball at Windsor, a week ago. The Countess de Winter, with whom I had been at variance, approached me during the ball. This appearance of reconciliation was really the revenge of an offended woman. Since that day I have not seen her. That woman is an agent of the cardinal's."

"What! has he agents all over the world?" asked D'Artagnan.

"Oh, yes," replied Buckingham, grinding his teeth with rage, "yes, he is a terrible adversary. But when will this ball take place?"

"Next Monday."

"Next Monday? Five days still left; it is more time than we shall need. Patrice!" exclaimed the duke, opening the door of the chapel; "Patrice!"

His confidential valet appeared.

"My jeweler, and my secretary!"

The valet departed with a quiet promptitude, which proved the habit he had acquired of blind obedience.

But, although the jeweler had been the first sent for it was the secretary who, as he resided in the mansion, was the first to arrive. He found Buckingham seated before a table, writing orders with his own hand.

"Jackson," said he, "you will go to the lord chan-

cellor and tell him that I charge him to execute the orders. I desire them to be made public immediately.

"But, my lord duke, if the lord chancellor shou question me about the motives which have induc your grace to adopt so extraordinary a measure, wh am I to answer?"

"That such is my pleasure, and that I am not oblig to give anybody an account of my motives."

"Is that to be the reply he is to transmit to the king returned the secretary, smiling, "if by chance his majes should have the curiosity to inquire why no vessel mu leave a British port?"

"You are right, sir," answered Buckingham; " must, in that case, tell the king that I have decided war, and that this measure is my first act of hostili against France."

The secretary bowed and departed.

"There we may rest easy on *one* point," said Buckin ham, turning towards D'Artagnan. "If the studs ha not yet gone to France, they will not arrive till aft you."

"How so?"

"I have just laid an embargo on all ships at prese in his majesty's ports; and without express permissi not one will dare to raise its anchor."

D'Artagnan looked with wonder at the man who th applied, in the service of his love, the unlimited pow with which he was intrusted by the king.

Buckingham saw, from the expression of his count nance, what was passing in the youth's mind, and smile

"Yes," said he; "yes, it is Anne of Austria who my true queen. At her lightest word I would betra my country, my king, my God. She desired me not send to the Protestants of La Rochelle the aid that had promised them, and she has been obeyed. I fo feited my word, but of what consequence was that, her will was gratified? Was I not nobly recompense for my obedience?—for it was to that obedience tha I owe her portrait."

D'Artagnan marveled at the fragile unseen threads on which the destinies of nations and the lives of men are sometimes suspended.

He was immersed in these reflections when the jeweler entered. He was an Irishman, but one who was most skillful in his calling, and who confessed that he made a hundred thousand francs a year through the Duke of Buckingham.

"O'Reilly," said the duke, conducting him to the chapel," look at these diamond studs, and tell me what they are worth apiece."

The goldsmith glanced at the elegant manner in which they were chased and mounted, calculated one by one the value of the diamonds, and without hesitation replied:

"Fifteen hundred pistoles each, my lord."

"How many days would be required to make two studs like those? You see that two are wanting."

"A week, my lord."

"I will pay three thousand pistoles each for them, but I must have them the day after to-morrow."

"Your grace shall have them."

"You are an invaluable man, O'Reilly, but this is not all: these studs must not be intrusted to any one; it is necessary that you should mount them in this house."

"Impossible, my lord. Mine are the only hands that can make them so that no one could discover the difference between the new and the old studs."

"Well, then, my dear O'Reilly, you are my prisoner, and even if you wished to leave the palace now, you could not. Tell me which of your workmen you want and specify the tools which they must bring you."

The jeweler knew the duke and that all remonstrances were vain. He therefore made up his mind at once.

"May I inform my wife?" said he.

"Oh! you may even see her, my dear O'Reilly," said the duke; "your captivity shall not be harsh, I assure you; and, as every inconvenience should have its recompense, here is a present of a thousand pistoles,

beyond the price of the two studs, to make you forge the annoyance you may experience."

D'Artagnan could not recover from his surprise at th minister's actions, who made such a profuse use of me and millions.

As for the jeweler, he wrote to his wife, sending he the order for a thousand pistoles, and requesting her t send him in exchange, his most skillful apprentice an an assortment of diamonds, of which he sent her th weight and description, with a list of the requisite tool

Buckingham conducted the jeweler to the chambe prepared for him, which in the course of half an hou was converted into a work-shop. He then placed sentinel at each door, with strict orders to allow no on to pass except his valet, Patrice. It need scarcely b added that O'Reilly and his assistant were absolutel forbidden to go out on any pretense whatever.

This being arranged, the duke turned to D'Artagnan.

"Now, my young friend," said he, "England belong to us two. What is your first wish?"

"A bed," answered D'Artagnan. "I confess, a present, that is what I stand most in need of."

Buckingham allotted D'Artagnan a room adjoinin his own. He wished to keep the young man near him not that he distrusted him, but that he might hav some one to whom he could constantly talk about th queen.

An hour afterward the order was promulgated through out London that no ship would be permitted to leave th ports for France—not even the packet-boat with letters In everybody's opinion this was a declaration of wa between the two kingdoms.

At eleven o'clock on the second day the diamon studs were finished, and so exactly imitated, so perfectl alike, that Buckingham himself could not distinguis the new ones from the old. Even the most skillful i such matters would have been deceived as he was.

He immediately summoned D'Artagnan.

"Here," said he, "are the diamond studs which yo

came so far to fetch; and bear witness for me that I have done everything human power could accomplish."

"Rest assured, my lord, that I will truly represent what I have seen. But your grace gives me the studs without the casket."

"The casket would only inconvenience you. Besides, the box is all the more precious to me, now that I have nothing else. You will tell the queen I kept it."

"I will execute your commission, my lord, word for word."

"And now," said Buckingham, looking earnestly at the young man, "how can I ever repay my debt to you?"

D'Artagnan blushed, even to the whites of his eyes. He saw that the duke wanted to find some means of making him a present; and the idea that his own blood and that of his companions should be paid for in English gold was strangely repugnant to him.

"Let us understand one another, my lord," said D'Artagnan, "and allow me to state the case fairly, that there may be no misconception. I am in the service of the king and queen of France and belong to the guards of M. des Essarts, who, as well as M. de Treville, is more particularly attached to their majesties. Everything that I have done has therefore been for the queen, and nothing for your grace. More than that, perhaps I should not have taken a single step in the affair, if it had not been to please some one who is as dear to me as the queen is to you."

"Yes," said the duke, "and I believe that I know who that person——"

"My lord, I have not named her," said D'Artagnan, quickly.

"It is true," replied the duke. "I must therefore show my gratitude to that person for your devotion."

"Just so, my lord; for, now that we are about to go to war, I confess that I see nothing in your grace but an Englishman, and, consequently, an enemy, whom I should be even more delighted to meet on the field of

battle than in the park at Windsor or in the galleries o the Louvre. This, however, will not prevent me fron executing every particular of my mission and welcomin death, if need be, to accomplish it ; but I repeat to you grace that you have nothing more to thank me for in thi second interview than I have already done for you in th first."

" We say, in our country, ' proud as a Scotchman,' " muttered Buckingham.

" And we," answered D'Artagnan, " say, ' haughty a a Gascon.' The Gascons are the Scots of France."

D'Artagnan bowed to the duke and was about to tak his leave.

" Well ! " said the duke, " are you going in tha manner ? But what course will you take ? How wil you get off ? "

" True, I never thought of that."

" Egad ! you Frenchmen stick at nothing."

" I had forgotten that England is an island and tha your grace is its king."

" Go to the port, ask for the brig ' Sund,' and give thi letter to the captain. He will take you to a small har bor, where you will certainly not be expected and where few but fishing smacks ever put in."

" And the name of this harbor is——"

" St. Valery But listen ; as soon as they put you ashore you will go to a wretched wine-shop, without either name or sign, a true sailors' boozing ken ; you cannot mistake it ; there is but one."

" And then——"

" You will ask for the host, and you will say to him ' *Forward.*' "

" What does that mean ? "

" It is the watchword which compels him to assist you on your way. He will give you a horse ready saddled and show you the road that you should take, and you will, in this manner, find four relays upon your road. If you please at each of them to give your address at Paris, the four horses will follow you there ; you already

know two of them and appear to have estimated them as an amateur. They are the ones we rode, and you may trust me that the others are not inferior. These four horses are equipped for the field. Proud as you are, you will not refuse to accept one, and to present the three others to your companions. Besides, they are to help you in fighting against us. The end justifies the means, as you French say—am I not right ?"

"Yes, my lord, I accept your presents," said D'Artagnan ; "and, God willing, we will make good use of them."

"Now give me your hand, young man. Perhaps we may soon meet on the field of battle ; but, in the meantime, I hope we part good friends."

"Yes, my lord, with the hope of soon becoming enemies."

"Be contented ; I give you my word."

"I depend upon your grace's promise."

D'Artagnan bowed to the duke and hastened toward the port.

Opposite the Tower of London he found the vessel to which he had been directed and gave his letter to the captain, who got it countersigned by the governor of the port and then prepared to sail immediately.

Fifty vessels were waiting, in readiness to put to sea. On passing one of them, side by side, D'Artagnan thought he saw the woman of Meung—the same whom the unknown gentleman had called *Milady*, and whom he himself had thought so beautiful ; but, thanks to the current and the favorable breeze, his vessel glided on so swiftly that in a few minutes it had left the others far behind.

The next morning about nine o'clock he landed at St. Valery.

D'Artagnan immediately went to the appointed wine-shop, which he recognized by the hubbub from within. The war between France and England was spoken of as certain, and the sailors were making unusually merry.

D'Artagnan pushed his way through the crowd, ap-

proached the host and pronounced the word *forward*. The host immediately made him a sign to follow, went out by a door which led into the courtyard, conducted him to the stables where stood a horse ready saddled, and asked him whether he needed anything else.

"I want to know the road I am to take," said D'Artagnan.

"Go from this place to Blangy, and from Blangy to Neufchatel. At Neufchatel, go to the tavern of the Golden Harrow; give the watchword to the innkeeper, and you will find, as here, a horse ready saddled."

"What's to pay?" asked D'Artagnan.

"Everything is paid," said the host, "and most liberally. Go, then, and God protect you."

"Amen!" said the young man, as he galloped off.

In four hours he was at Neufchatel.

Strictly following his instructions at Neufchatel, as at St. Valery, he found a saddled horse awaiting him; and when he was about to transfer the pistols from the one saddle to the other, he perceived that even the holsters were already duly furnished.

"Your address at Paris?"

"D'Artagnan—Hôtel des Gardes, company des Essarts."

"Very well," answered the innkeeper.

"What road am I to take?" demanded D'Artagnan.

"That of Rouen; but you will leave the town to your right. At the little village of Ecouis you will halt. There is but one tavern, the French Crown. Do not judge of it from its looks, for it will have in its stables a horse of equal value to this."

"The same watchword?"

"Exactly."

"Adieu, friend."

"A safe journey, sir. Do you require anything else?"

D'Artagnan said no, by a shake of his head, and went off again at full speed. At Ecouis the same scene was repeated. He found a host equally well prepared, a horse fresh and ready. He left his address as before

and departed in the same way for Pontoise. At Pontoise he changed his horse for the last time, and at nine o'clock he entered the courtyard of M. de Treville's hotel, at full gallop.

He had got over nearly sixty leagues in twelve hours. M. de Treville received him just as though he had seen him the same morning, merely pressing his hand a little more warmly than usual. He informed him that the company of M. des Essarts was on guard at the Louvre, and that he might return to his post.

CHAPTER XXII.

THE BALLET OF THE MERLAISON.

THE next morning nothing was talked of in Paris but the ball the magistrates were in giving honor of the king and queen, and in which their majesties were to dance the famous ballet of *The Merlaison*, which was the favorite ballet of the king.

For a whole week every preparation had been making at the Hôtel de Ville for this important entertainment. The city carpenter had erected scaffolding, on which the ladies who had received invitations were to be seated in state; the city chandler had furnished the rooms with two hundred immense wax candles, which was an unprecedented luxury at that time, and twenty violins had been engaged, at double the price usually paid, on the understanding that they were to play the whole of the night.

At ten in the morning the Sieur de la Coste, ensign of the king's guards, followed by many archers of the guards, came to demand of Clement, the city registrar, all the keys of the gates, chambers and closets of the hotel. These keys were given to him immediately, each bearing a ticket indicating to what it belonged; and from that moment the Sieur de la Coste had the superintendence of all the doors and avenues.

Duhalier, the captain of the guards, came in his turn at eleven o'clock and brought with him fifty archers who stationed themselves immediately at the several doors which had been assigned to them in the Hôtel de Ville.

At three o'clock there arrived two companies of guards, one French, the other Swiss. The company of French guards was composed of equal numbers of the troops of M. Duhalier and of M. des Essarts.

The company began to arrive at six o'clock, and were at once conducted to the seats prepared for them in the grand salon.

The lady-president arrived at nine o'clock. As she was, next to the queen, the most distinguished individual invited to the entertainment, she was received by the gentlemen of the city and conducted to a box opposite that of the queen.

At ten o'clock a collation of jellies and sweets was prepared for the king, in the small room on the side of the church of St. Jean, on the city's sideboard of silver which was guarded by four archers.

At midnight loud cries and multitudinous acclamations resounded through the streets. It was the king who was proceeding from the Louvre to the Hôtel de Ville, through thoroughfares illuminated in their whole length by colored lamps.

The magistrates, clothed in their robes of scarlet cloth, and preceded by the sergeants, each holding a torch in his hand, hastened to receive the king, whom they met upon the steps, where the provost of the merchants complimented him with an address of welcome, to which his majesty replied by excuses for the lateness of his arrival, for which he blamed the cardinal who had detained him until eleven o'clock discoursing on affairs of state.

His majesty in full dress was accompanied by his royal highness the king's brother, the Count de Soissons, the Grand Prior, the Duke de Longueville, the Duke d'Elbeuf, the Count d'Harcourt, the Count de la Roche

Guyon, M. de Liancourt, M. de Baradas, the Count de Cramail and the Chevalier de Souvery.

Every one remarked that the king looked preoccupied and sombre.

A cabinet had been prepared for the king and a second one for his royal brother. In each of these were laid masquerade dresses. A similar preparation had been made for the queen and for the lady-president. The lords and ladies in their majesties' suites were to dress themselves two by two in apartments set aside for that purpose.

Before he entered his closet the king desired to be apprised of the cardinal's arrival as soon as it had taken place.

Half an hour after the arrival of the king fresh acclamations resounded; these announced the arrival of the queen. The magistrates went through the same formalities as before and, preceded by their sergeants, advanced to meet their illustrious guest.

The queen entered the room, and it was remarked that, like the king, she looked sad and also weary.

The moment that she entered, the curtains of a small tribune which had till then been closed, were opened and the pale face of the cardinal appeared, clothed as a Spanish cavalier. His eyes fixed themselves on those of the queen and a smile of terrible joy passed across his lips. The queen was there without her diamond studs.

Her majesty remained for a short time receiving the compliments of the city gentlemen and answering the salutations of the ladies.

Suddenly the king appeared with the cardinal at one of the doors of the salon. The cardinal spoke to him in a low voice and the king grew very pale.

The king broke through the crowd, without a mask and with the ribbons of his doublet scarcely tied, approached the queen and in an agitated voice, said,—

"Madame, wherefore, I pray you, are you not wearing your diamond studs, when you knew that I wished to see them?"

The queen looked around her and saw, behind th king, the cardinal, sardonically smiling.

"Sire," replied the queen, in an agitated voice, "be cause, amidst this great crowd, I feared some acciden might befall them."

"And you were wrong, madame. I made you thi present in order that you might adorn yourself with it I tell you you were wrong!"

The voice of the king trembled with anger. Every on looked and listened with astonishment, not at all under standing this extraordinary scene.

"Sire," said the queen, "I can send for them to th Louvre, where they are; and thus the wishes of you majesty will be accomplished."

"Do so, madame, and that immediately; for in on hour the ballet will begin."

The queen bowed submissively and followed the ladies who conducted her to her cabinet.

The king also retired to his.

There was a momentary excitement and confusion i the salon. Every one could perceive that something had occurred between the king and the queen; but both of them had spoken so low that, as all had kept at a respectful distance, no one had heard anything. The violins played strenuously, but no one listened to them.

The king left his chamber first. He wore a very elegant hunting-dress, and his brother and the other nobles were dressed in the same costume. This was the kind of dress most becoming to the king; and thus habited he looked in very deed the first gentleman o his realm.

The cardinal approached the king, and gave him a box, in which his majesty found two diamond studs.

"What does this mean?" demanded the king.

"Nothing," answered the cardinal, "only if the queen has the studs, which I much doubt, count them, sire, and if you only find ten, ask her majesty who can have robbed her of the remaining two."

The king looked inquisitively at the cardinal, bu

here was no time to put any further questions. An exclamation of admiration burst from every lip. If the king appeared to be first gentleman of his realm, the queen was indisputably the most lovely woman in France.

It is true her costume of a huntress fitted her most charmingly. She wore a beaver hat with blue feathers, a robe of pearl grey velvet, fastened with diamond clasps, and a skirt of blue satin embroidered with silver. Over her left shoulder glittered the studs, suspended by a knot of the same color as the feathers and the skirt.

The king trembled with joy and the cardinal with anger. Yet, distant as they were from the queen, they could not count the studs, and, although the queen had them, the question was, were there ten or twelve?

At this moment the violins sounded the announcement of the ballet. The king advanced with the president's lady, with whom he was to dance, and his royal highness with the queen. They took their places and the ballet began.

The king figured opposite the queen, and as often as he passed near her he looked eagerly at the studs, which he could not manage to count. A cold moisture hung upon the cardinal's brow.

The ballet lasted for an hour; there were sixteen figures. At its conclusion, amidst the applause of the whole assemblage, every one conducted his lady to her place; but the king profited by his privilege to leave his partner where she was and advanced quickly toward the queen.

"I thank you, madame," said he, "for the deference you have paid to my wishes, but I believe that you have lost two studs, and I bring them to you."

At these words he offered her the studs which he had received from the cardinal.

"What, sire," cried the queen, pretending surprise, "do you give me two more? Why, that will make fourteen!"

In fact, the king counted them, and saw that twelve studs glittered on her majesty's shoulder.

The king summoned the cardinal.

"Well, what does all this mean, cardinal?" d manded the king, in a severe tone.

"It means, sire," answered the cardinal, "that wished her majesty to accept these two studs; but, n daring myself to make her the offer, I adopted th method."

"And I am the more grateful to your eminence replied the queen, with a smile that proved she was n the dupe of this ingenious gallantry, "as I am certa that those two must have cost you more than the oth twelve cost his majesty."

Then, having courtesied to the king and the cardina the queen took her way to the chamber where she ha now to change her dress.

The attention which we have been obliged to besto upon the illustrious personages introduced at the cor mencement of this chapter has diverted us for a tin from him to whom Anne of Austria was indebted for tl unprecedented triumph which she had just gained ov the cardinal, and who, confused, unrecognized, and lo amidst the crowd at one of the doors, contemplat from his obscure corner a scene which was incomprehe sible to all but four persons—the king, the queen, tl cardinal and himself.

The queen had returned to her apartment and D'A tagnan was going to retire, when some one light touched him on the shoulder. He turned, and saw young woman, who made a sign that he should follo her. This young woman wore a black velvet mask but, in spite of that precaution, which, after all, w taken more against others than himself, he immediate recognized his ordinary guide, the lively and clev Madame Bonancieux.

They had met the night before, but only for an instan at the lodge of Germain, the Swiss, where D'Artagna inquired for her. The anxiety of the young woman communicate the good news of her messenger's happ return to the queen prevented the two lovers fro

xchanging more than a few words. On this account d'Artagnan followed Madame Bonancieux, influenced y the double sentiment of love and curiosity. Dur- ng their progress, and as the corridors became more eserted, he endeavored to stop the young woman, to ouch her, were it but for a moment; but, quick as a ird, she glided between his hands, and when he wished o speak she placed her finger on her lip, and with a ttle gesture of command which was not without its harm, reminded him that he was under the dominion f a power which he must blindly obey and which inter- licted even the least complaint. After a few turns Madame Bonancieux opened a door and pushed the oung man into a small chamber, which was nearly dark. here she again enjoined silence, and opening a second loor concealed in the tapestry, through which a brilliant ight emanated, she disappeared.

D'Artagnan remained a moment motionless and won- lering where he was; but shortly a ray of light which enetrated into this chamber, a warm and perfumed air which reached him, and the conversation of two or three vomen, in language at once respectful and elegant, in which the word *majesty* was frequently repeated, clearly ndicated to him that he was in a cabinet adjacent to he queen's apartment.

The young man kept silence in the gloom and listened.

The queen appeared gay and happy, which seemed to stonish the ladies who surrounded her, who were ac- ustomed to see her almost always full of care.

The queen attributed this joyful feeling to the beauty f the fête and to the pleasure which she had experienced n the ballet; and as it is not permissible to controvert queen, whether she is merry or sad, every one ex- patiated on the gallantry of these magistrates of the ood city of Paris.

Although d'Artagnan did not know the queen, he oon distinguished her voice from those of the others— irst, by a slight foreign accent, and then by that accent f command that is usually characteristic of the speech

of sovereigns. He heard her approach and retire fro that open door and once or twice saw the shadow of h person intercept the light. Suddenly, however, a har and arm of an adorable fairness were passed through t tapestry. D'Artagnan comprehended that this was h reward; he threw himself upon his knees, seized th hand, respectfully pressed his lips upon it, and then was withdrawn, leaving in his hand what he soon reco nized to be a ring. The door was immediately shu and D'Artagnan was again left in complete darkness.

He put the ring upon his finger and once more waite It was evident that all was not yet ended. After t recompense of his loyalty should come the recompense his love. Besides, although the ballet had been dance the entertainment was scarcely yet begun. The supp was to take place at three and the clock of St. Jo had struck half-past two.

By degrees, in fact, the sound of voices diminished the neighboring chamber, and the ladies were then hea to leave it; after which the door of the cabinet w opened, and Madame Bonancieux sprang in.

"You come at last!" cried D'Artagnan.

"Silence!" said the young woman, putting her ha upon his lips, "and go out again the same way y came."

"But where and when shall I see you?" cried D'A tagnan.

"A note which you will find at your lodgings will t you. Go! go!"

And at these words she opened the door of the corrid and pushed D'Artagnan out of the cabinet.

He obeyed like a child, without resistance or obje tion, even, which proves that he was very much in lov

CHAPTER XXIII.

THE APPOINTMENT.

D'ARTAGNAN ran the whole of the way home; and although it was three in the morning and he had to pass through the worst parts of Paris, he met with no obstruction. There is said to be a special deity for drunkards and lovers.

He found the door in the passage open, ascended his stairs and knocked gently, in a way agreed upon between him and his servant; Planchet, whom he had sent back two hours before from the Hôtel de Ville to wait for him, came and opened the door.

"Has any one brought me a letter?" eagerly inquired D'Artagnan.

"No one has brought a letter," said Planchet, "but here is one which came of itself."

"What do you mean, simpleton?"

"I mean that when I came in, although I had the key of your apartment in my pocket, and although this key had never been out of my possession, I beheld a letter lying on the green cover of your bedroom table."

"And where is that letter?"

"I left it where it was, sir. It is not natural for letters to enter gentlemen's rooms in this manner. If, indeed, the window had been found open, I should say nothing, but it was securely closed. Have a care, sir, for there is certainly some magic in it."

In the meantime the young man had rushed into his chamber and opened the letter. It was expressed in these terms:

"The warmest thanks are yours, and now await transmission. Be at St. Cloud this evening at ten o'clock, opposite the pavilion which stands at the angle of M. d'Estrees's house. C. B."

On reading these words D'Artagnan felt his heart

dilating and contracting in that sweet spasm which the torture and delight of lovers.

It was the first note he had received—the first appointment that had been granted him. His heart, expanding in the intoxication of his joy, felt as though would faint on the very threshold of that terrestri paradise which is denominated love.

"Well, sir," said Planchet, who had seen his master color come and go, "was I not right, and is not th letter some unlucky sign?"

"You are mistaken, Planchet; and the proof is, he is a crown for you to drink my health."

"I thank you, sir, and will strictly follow your directions; but it is not the less true that letters which th enter closed houses——"

"Fall from Heaven, my friend—fall from Heaven!"

"Then you are satisfied, sir?"

"My dear Planchet, I am the happiest of men."

"And I may take advantage of your happiness, ar go to bed?"

"Yes, go."

"May Heaven's choicest blessings fall upon you, sir but it is not the less true that this letter——"

And Planchet retired, shaking his head with an air doubt which the liberality of D'Artagnan had not bee able entirely to efface.

As soon as he was left alone D'Artagnan read the no over and over again, and kissed at least twenty time these lines traced by the hand of his beautiful mistres At length he retired to bed and slept and was visite by golden dreams.

At seven o'clock in the morning D'Artagnan arose an called Planchet, who at the second summons opene the door, his countenance still bearing traces of his ur easiness of the previous evening.

"Planchet," said he, "I am going out, probably fo the whole day; you are therefore free till seven o'cloc in the evening; but you must be ready at that hou with two horses."

"Well!" said Planchet, "I suppose we are going to have our skins bored again in a few places."

"You will take your carbine and pistols."

"There! did not I say so?" exclaimed Planchet. "Ah! I was sure of it—that cursed letter!"

"Rest contented, simpleton; it is only a party of pleasure."

"Yes, like that most delightful journey the other day, when it rained balls and snowed caltrops."

"If you are afraid, Planchet, I will go by myself. I prefer traveling alone to being accompanied by cowardly companions."

"You are unjust to me, sir," said Planchet. "I thought, however, that you had noted me at work."

"Yes, but I suppose you expended all your courage on that particular occasion."

"You shall see at a fitting time that some yet remains; only, I entreat you not to be too prodigal of it, if you wish it to last long."

"Do you think that you have still a small amount that you can put to use this evening?"

"I hope so."

"Well, then, I depend upon you."

"At the hour appointed I will be ready; but I thought there was only one horse in the stables at the hotel."

"Perhaps there may be only one there at present; but in the evening there will be four."

"It seems as if our journey was an expedition to provide fresh horses for ourselves."

"Exactly so," said D'Artagnan; and giving Planchet a last warning gesture, he went off.

M. Bonancieux was at his door and D'Artagnan intended to pass by without speaking to the worthy mercer; but the latter accosted him so softly and kindly that the tenant was obliged not only to bow in return, but also to enter into conversation.

How, indeed, was it possible not to display some slight complaisance towards the husband of a woman who had just made an appointment with one at St. Cloud, oppo-

site the pavilion of M. d'Estrees, for that very evening D'Artagnan approached him, therefore, with the mos amiable manner he was able to assume.

The conversation naturally turned on the poor man imprisonment; and M. Bonancieux, not knowing tha the young man had overheard his conversation with th man of Meung, related the persecutions of that monste M. de Laffemas, whom he styled, throughout the whol of his narrative, the cardinal's executioner, and dis coursed freely concerning the Bastile, the bolts, th dungeons, the air-holes, the gates, and instruments c torture.

D'Artagnan listened with the most exemplary atten tion; then, when he had ended:

"And Madame Bonancieux," said he; "do you kno who carried her off? for I do not forget that it is t that vexatious occurrence that I owe the happiness o your acquaintance."

"Ah!" answered M. Bonancieux, "they took goo care not to tell me that; and my wife, on her part, ha solemnly sworn that she did not know. But you your self," continued Bonancieux, in a tone of the most per fect good-fellowship, "what has become of you for th last few days? I have seen neither you nor your friends and it was not on the pavement of Paris, I should sup pose, that you picked up all the mud Planchet scrape off your boots last night."

"You are right, my dear Bonancieux; I and m friends have been making a short journey."

"Did you go far?"

"Oh, Lord, no! merely about forty leagues. W went to conduct M. Athos to the waters of Forges, wher my friends are stopping."

"And so you have come back, have you?" resume M. Bonancieux, with the most cunning look possible "A handsome youth like you cannot get long leave o absence from his mistress. And you were impatientl expected at Paris, were you not? Ha!"

"Faith," said the young man, laughing, "I confes

the more willingly, my dear M. Bonancieux, as I erceive that I can conceal nothing from you. Yes, I as expected, and most impatiently, I assure you."

A shade passed over Bonancieux's countenance, but disappeared so quickly D'Artagnan did not perceive it.

"And you are about to be rewarded for your dili- ence?" continued the mercer, with a slight alteration f voice, which D'Artagnan did not perceive any more han the momentary cloud that had passed over the ace of the worthy man.

"I hope you may prove a true prophet!" exclaimed 'Artagnan, laughing.

"What I say to you," continued Bonancieux, "is nerely to learn whether you will return late."

"Why this question, my dear landlord?" asked 'Artagnan. "Is it because you intend to wait for me?"

"No, it is because, ever since my imprisonment and he robbery which was committed on me, I am frightened very time I hear a door opened, and particularly at ight. By our Lady, I cannot help it! I am no soldier, ruly!"

"Well, do not be frightened if I enter at one, two, or hree o'clock in the morning, or even if I do not enter at ll."

Bonancieux became so pale this time that D'Artagnan ould not help observing it and asked what was the natter.

"Nothing," replied Bonancieux, "nothing. Only, nce my misfortunes, I am subject to these feelings, hich seize me on a sudden and make me shudder. on't trouble yourself about that—you have enough to ccupy you in your approaching happiness."

"Oh, I am occupied in being happy now."

"Not yet; wait a little: you said that it would be -night."

"Well! the night will come, thank God, and perhaps ou also expect it as impatiently as I do. Perhaps this vening Madame Bonancieux intends to visit the con- ugal home."

"Madame Bonancieux is not disengaged this evening," gravely replied Bonancieux; "she is detained at the Louvre by her official duty."

"So much the worse for you, my dear landlord; so much the worse. When I am happy myself I should like all the world to be so too, but that appears impossible."

And the young man went off, laughing loudly at the joke, which he alone, as he imagined, could understand.

"Laugh as you like," said Bonancieux, in a sepulchral tone.

But D'Artagnan was already too far off to hear him, and if he had heard, in the disposition of mind in which he then was, he would not have heeded.

He went toward the hotel of M. de Treville, his visit of the evening before having been, as will be remembered, very short, and not very explanatory.

He found M. de Treville in the heartiest joy. The king and queen had been most gracious to him at the ball. The cardinal, it is true, had been very grumpy. At one o'clock in the morning he had retired, under pretence of indisposition. As to their majesties, they did not return to the Louvre till six in the morning.

"Now," said M. de Treville, lowering his voice, and looking cautiously around the room to be sure that they were alone, "now, my young friend, let us talk of yourself, for it is evident that your safe return has something to do with the king's joy, the queen's triumph, and his eminence's humiliation. You must take care of yourself."

"What have I to fear," answered D'Artagnan, "as long as I have the good fortune to enjoy their majesties' favor?"

"Everything, believe me. The cardinal is not the man to forget being made a fool of, at least until he has settled accounts with the man who has duped him; and that person *seems* to me to be a certain youth of my acquaintance."

"Do you believe that the cardinal has got so far

ou have and knows that I am the individual who has een to London ?"

"The devil! you have been to London! And is it rom London that you bring that beautiful diamond hich glitters on your finger? Take care, my dear 'Artagnan, the present of an enemy is not a good hing! Is there not a certain Latin verse about it? isten!"

"Yes, undoubtedly," said D'Artagnan, who had never een able to knock the first rudiments into his head, and ho had driven his preceptor to despair by his ignorance; yes, undoubtedly there must be one."

"Yes," said M. de Treville, who had a small amount f learning, "there is one, certainly, and M. Benserade as quoting it to me the other day; wait a moment. h! here it is!—

"'*Timeo Danaos et dona ferentes.*'

hich means, 'distrust your enemy, although he brings gift.'"

"This diamond does not come from an enemy, sir," plied D'Artagnan, "it comes from the queen."

"From the queen!" said M. de Treville. "Oh! oh! ruly, it is a veritable royal jewel, which is worth a housand pistoles, if it is worth a farthing. By whom id the queen send it to you?"

"She handed it to me herself."

"Where was that?"

"In the cabinet adjoining the apartment where she hanged her dress."

"How?"

"In giving me her hand to kiss."

"And you have kissed the queen's hand?" said M. de reville, looking at D'Artagnan.

"Her majesty did me the honor to grant me that vor."

"And in the presence of witnesses? Imprudent! oubly imprudent!"

"No, sir; no one saw her," replied D'Artagnan, ar
he related to M. de Treville how everything had occurre
"Oh! women, women!" cried the old soldier, "
recognize them so well by their romantic imaginatio
everything which is at all mysterious charms the
Then you saw the arm, and that was all! You migh
meet the queen and not recognize her? She migh
meet you and not know who you were?"

"No; but thanks to this diamond——" replied th
young man.

"Listen," said M. de Treville. "Will you allow m
to give you a bit of advice—good advice—the advice
a friend?"

"You will do me honor, sir," replied D'Artagnan.

"Well, then, go to the first jeweler's you can fin
and sell this diamond for what he will give you for i
However much of a Jew he may be you will get at lea
eight hundred pistoles. The pistoles have no nam
young man, but this ring has a terrible one, which migh
destroy him who wears it."

"Sell this ring—a ring given me by my sovereign
Never!"

"Then turn the stone within, poor simpleton; fo
every one knows that a Gascon youth does not find suc
gems in his mother's jewel-case."

"You suspect, then, that I have some cause for fear?
said D'Artagnan.

"I mean to say, young man, that a man who sleep
over a mine, with the match lighted, may think himse
safe in comparison with you."

"The devil!" said D'Artagnan, whom M. de Treville
serious tone began to disturb. "The devil! And wha
am I to do?"

"Be always, above all things, on your guard. Th
cardinal has a tenacious memory and a long arm; be
lieve me, he will play you some trick."

"But?"

"Ah! has he not at his command all the wiles o
Satan? The *best* that can happen to you is imprisonment.

"What? Would they dare arrest a man on her majesty's service?"

"Egad! what did they do to Athos? At any rate, young madcap, believe a man who has been thirty years at court; do not slumber in security, or you are lost. On the contrary, I warn you to see enemies everywhere. If any one seeks to pick a quarrel with you, avoid it, even if it should be but a child ten years of age; if you are attacked, by night or by day, beat a retreat without being ashamed of it; if you pass over a bridge, try the planks for fear one should break beneath your feet; if you walk past a house which is being built, look up in the air lest a stone should fall upon your head; if you come home late let your servant follow you, and let him be armed, if you can even make sure of your servant. Distrust everybody—your friend, your brother, ah! your mistress most of all."

D'Artagnan blushed.

"My mistress!" he mechanically repeated; "and why her more than any one else?"

"Because a mistress is one of the favorite agents of the cardinal; he has none more expeditious. A woman will sell a man for ten pistoles—witness Delilah. You know the Scripture, ha?"

D'Artagnan thought of the appointment which Madame Bonancieux had made for that very evening; but we must say, to the praise of our hero, that the bad opinion which M. de Treville entertained of women in general did not inspire him with the slightest suspicion against his pretty landlady.

"But, apropos," resumed M. de Treville, "what is become of your three companions?"

"I was just going to inquire whether you had not received any tidings of them?"

"None whatever, sir."

"Well, I left them behind me on my way—Porthos at Chantilly, with a duel on his hands; Aramis at Crevecœur, with a bullet in his shoulder; and Athos at Amiens, under an accusation of passing bad money."

"Look there, now!" said M. de Treville. "A how did you escape yourself?"

"By a miracle, sir, I must confess; with a swo thrust in the chest, and by pinning the Count de War on his back, on the road to Calais, as one might pi butterfly on the tapestry."

"There again! De Wardes—one of the cardina men, and a cousin of Rochefort's. Come, my dear frie an idea has struck me."

"Speak, sir."

"In your position there is one thing I would do."

"What is that?"

"Whilst his eminence was seeking for me at Paris would return, without sound of drum or trumpet, on t road to Picardy, and would endeavor to find out wh had become of my three companions. Surely, at t least, they merit this slight attention on your part."

"The advice is good, sir, and to-morrow I will go."

"To-morrow! and why not this very night?"

"This evening, sir, I am detained in Paris by affair of importance."

"Ah, young man, young man! some love affa Take care! I repeat it once more, it is woman w has always ruined us, even from the beginning, a who will ruin us to the end. Be advised by me: depa this evening."

"Impossible, sir."

"Have you given your word?"

"Yes, sir."

"That is another matter; but promise me if y are not killed to-night that you will set out to-morrow."

"I promise you."

"Do you want money?"

"I have fifty pistoles remaining; it is as much as shall require, I think."

"But your companions?"

"I think that they can be in no want. We le Paris with seventy-five pistoles in the pockets of ea of us."

"Shall I see you again before your departure?"

"I think not, sir, unless something unexpected should turn up."

"Well, a safe journey to you."

"Thanks, sir."

And D'Artagnan took his leave of M. de Treville, more than ever sensible of his paternal solicitude for his musketeers.

He went successively to the homes of Athos, Porthos, and Aramis, but not one of them had returned. Their servants were also absent and nothing had been heard of any of them.

He might possibly have gained some tidings of them from their mistresses, but he knew not those of Porthos and Aramis, and Athos had none.

In passing the hotel of the guards he looked in at the stables. Three of the four horses were already there. Planchet, quite astounded, was busy currying them, and had already finished two out of the three.

"Ah, sir," said Planchet, "how glad I am to see you."

"And why so, Planchet?" demanded the young man.

"Can you depend on M. Bonancieux, our landlord?"

"Me? Not in the slightest degree."

"And you are quite right too, sir."

"But why do you ask the question?"

"Because whilst you were talking to him I looked, without listening, sir; and his countenance changed color two or three times."

"Bah!"

"You did not observe it, sir, preoccupied as you were by the letter you had just received; but I, on the contrary, being on my guard on account of the strange manner in which this letter flew into the house, did not allow one variation of his countenance to escape me."

"And what did you discover?"

"That he is a traitor."

"Really?"

"And, moreover, the moment you had turned the

corner of the street M. Bonancieux took his hat, sh his door, and began to run down the street."

"Upon my word, you are quite right, Planchet, this looks awkward enough; but be contented—we w not pay him one farthing of rent till all this is sat factorily explained."

"You take it as a joke, sir, but you will see."

"What would you have, Planchet? What is happen is written."

"Then, sir, you do not renounce your expedition th evening?"

"On the contrary, Planchet, the more I dislike Bonancieux, the more inclined am I to keep the appoin ment made in this letter which disturbs you so much."

"Then it is your determination?"

"Immovably so, my friend; therefore, at sev o'clock be ready at the hotel, and I will come for you."

Planchet, seeing there was no hope of making h master renounce his project, heaved a profound si and set to work currying the third horse.

As for D'Artagnan, who was fundamentally a you man of great prudence, instead of going to his own hom he went and dined with the young Gascon priest, wh during the temporary distress of the four friends, h given them a breakfast.

CHAPTER XXIV.

THE PAVILION.

At seven o'clock D'Artagnan was at the Hôtel d Gardes. He found Planchet under arms and the four horse arrived. Planchet was armed with his carbine a pistol. D'Artagnan had provided himself with his swo and placed two pistols in his belt. They each mount their horses, and trotted off quietly. It was a da night and nobody witnessed their departure. Planch followed his master at a distance of ten paces.

D'Artagnan passed over the quays, went out by the ate of La Conference, and proceeded along the charming road—far more beautiful then than now—which eads to St. Cloud.

As long as they continued in the town Planchet kept he respectful distance that he had fixed for himself; ut, as the road became darker and more lonely, he radually drew nearer, so that when they entered the Bois de Boulogne he found himself quite naturally narching side by side with his master. In fact, we nust not conceal that the whisper of the trees and the noving shadows of the leaves within the sombre copse aused him great uneasiness. D'Artagnan perceived hat something extraordinary was incommoding his ackey.

"Well, Planchet," demanded he, "what ails you ow?"

"Do you not find, sir, that woods are like churches?"

"And why, Planchet?"

"Because one is as much afraid of speaking loudly n the one as in the other."

"Why dare you not speak loudly, Planchet—because ou are afraid?"

"Yes, sir; afraid of being heard."

"Afraid of being heard! Our conversation is very noral, my dear Planchet, and no one would find anyhing in it to censure."

"Ah, sir," replied Planchet, returning to the ruling lea on his mind, "what a sullen look that M Bonanieux has about the eyebrows, and something so unleasant in the working of his lips."

"What the plague makes you think so much of M. onancieux?"

"Sir, we think of what we must, and not of what we refer."

"Because you are a coward, Planchet."

"Let us not confound prudence with cowardice, sir. rudence is a virtue."

"And you are virtuous, are you not, Planchet?"

"Is not that the barrel of a musket, sir, shining the below? Suppose we were to stoop our heads?"

"Really," muttered D'Artagnan, who remembered tl advice of M. de Treville; "really, this noodle will finis by making *me* afraid." And he put his horse to a trot

Planchet followed his master's movements, precise as if he had been his shadow, and soon found himse trotting by his side.

"Must we travel in this manner all night, sir? demanded he.

"No, Planchet, for you are at your journey's end."

"What! I am at my journey's end? And yo sir?"

"I shall go some little way further."

"You mean to leave me here alone, sir?"

"Are you afraid, Planchet?"

"No; but I will merely observe to you, sir, that tl night will be very cold, that cold causes rheumatisr and that a lackey who has the rheumatism makes but sorry servant, especially to such an active master as have!"

"Well, then, if you are cold, you can enter one those wine-shops which you see down there; but yo must be waiting for me before the door at six o'clo to-morrow morning."

"But, sir, I have most dutifully eaten and drank tl crown that you gave me this morning; so that I ha not even a stray sou remaining, in case I should fe cold."

"There is a half-pistole. Good-bye till to-morro morning."

D'Artagnan got off his horse, threw the bridle Planchet, and hurried away, closely enveloped in h cloak.

"Good heavens! how cold I am!" exclaimed Pla chet, as soon as he had lost sight of his master, an eager as he was to warm himself, he hastened to ra at the door of a house, which had all the appearan of a suburban drinking-shop.

In the meantime D'Artagnan, who had taken a small cross-road, reached St. Cloud; but instead of proceeding along the main street, he turned behind the castle, went down a narrow, unfrequented lane, and soon found himself opposite the appointed pavilion. It was situated in a perfect desert of a place. A long wall, at the corner of which was the pavilion, ran along one side of this lane, and on the other a hedge protected a small garden from prying eyes, at the bottom of which stood a miserable cottage.

He had now reached the place of appointment, and as he had not been told to announce his presence by any signal, he waited.

Not a sound was heard; he might have fancied himself a hundred leagues from the capital. D'Artagnan cast a glance behind him and then leant his back against the hedge. Beyond this hedge, and garden and cottage, a heavy mist enveloped in its shade the dim immensity where Paris slept; a void and open immensity, in which a few scattered luminous points twinkled like the funeral stars of that pandemonium of suffering and sin.

But to D'Artagnan every aspect was a form of beauty; all images were wreathed in smiles; darkness was transparent light. The appointed hour was on the eve of striking.

In fact, at the end of a few minutes the belfry of St. Cloud slowly emitted ten strokes from its bellowing jaws.

There was something melancholy in those tones of bronze, which thus breathed their lamentations to the night. But these sounds, which told the hour he sighed for, vibrated harmoniously in the heart of the young man. His eyes were fixed on the pavilion, which stood at the corner of the wall and of which all the windows were closed with shutters, except one upon the first floor.

From this window there shone a soft light, which silvered the foliage of two or three linden trees that formed a group outside the park. Doubtless, behind

that little window which was so graciously lighted up pretty Madame Bonancieux awaited him. A lingering sentiment of diffidence doubtless restrained her, but now that the hour had struck the window would be opened and D'Artagnan would at last receive from the hands of love the meed of his devotion.

Flattered by this sweet persuasion, D'Artagnan waited half an hour without any impatience, keeping his eyes fixed upon that charming little abode, and distinguishing through the upper part of the window a part of those gilded cornices of the ceiling which gave evidence of the elegance of the remainder of the apartment.

The bells of St. Cloud announced half-past ten.

But this time, without D'Artagnan knowing why, a shudder ran through his veins. Perhaps, also, the cold began to affect him and he mistook for a moral impression what was in reality a merely physical sensation.

Then the idea occurred to him that he had misunderstood the hour of appointment and that it must have been eleven instead of ten.

He approached the window, placed himself under the ray of light, drew the letter from his pocket and read it again. He had not been mistaken, the appointment was really for ten o'clock.

He resumed his post, becoming uneasy at the solitude and silence.

It struck eleven.

D'Artagnan began to fear that something had really happened to Madame Bonancieux.

He clapped his hands three times, the usual signal of lovers, but nothing, not even echo, returned an answer. And then he thought, with dissatisfaction, that the young woman had perhaps fallen asleep whilst waiting for him.

He approached the wall and attempted to climb it, but it was newly rough-cast and he broke his nails for nothing.

At this moment he thought of the trees, the leaves of which still shimmered in the moonlight; and perceiv

ing that one drooped over the road, he fancied that from amidst its branches he might be able to peer into the pavilion.

The tree was easy to climb. Besides, D'Artagnan was scarcely twenty years of age and therefore well remembered his schoolboy occupations. In an instant he was in the midst of its branches and through the transparent windows his sight pierced the interior of the pavilion.

Strange it was,—and it made him shudder from the soles of his feet to the roots of his hair,—that gentle flame, that quiet lamp threw light upon a scene of appalling disorder; several panes of the window were shattered; the door of the room had been burst open, and hung, half broken, on its hinges; a table, which must have been covered with an elegant supper, lay upon the ground, and glasses in fragments, and crushed fruits, strewed the floor. Everything in the room indicated a violent and desperate struggle; and D'Artagnan believed that he could even detect, amidst this strange medley, some strips of clothes and stains of blood coagulated on the tablecloth and curtains.

With his heart beating horribly he hastily descended to the ground, to see if he could find any further traces of violence.

The little peaceful light still shone amidst the silence of the night. D'Artagnan then perceived—what had escaped him at first, when nothing prompted him to so close a scrutiny—that the earth was broken and marked by confused impressions of the footsteps of both men and horses. The wheels of a carriage, which seemed to have come from Paris, had, moreover, left upon the soft soil a deep rut, which proceeded no further than the pavilion and then recurved again toward Paris. And last of all, in pursuing his researches he found near the wall a woman's torn glove. But this glove, wherever it had not come in contact with the mud, was irreproachably unsoiled. It was one of those scented filmy gauntlets a lover likes to pull from a pretty hand.

As D'Artagnan pursued these investigations, a more abundant and yet chillier moisture bedewed his brow; his heart was wrung with anguish, and his respiration almost failed.

"And yet," said he to encourage himself, "perhaps this pavilion had nothing to do with Madame Bonancieux. Her appointment was *before* the pavilion, not *within* it. She has possibly been detained in Paris by her duties, or probably by her husband's jealousy."

But all these reflections were beaten down, driven to flight by that profound sentiment of grief which on some occasions takes exclusive possession of our entire being and announces to one's inner ears that some great suffering hovers over our heads.

And then D'Artagnan became almost frantic. He ran upon the highway, hastened along the road he had come by, and advanced as far as the ferry-boat and questioned the ferryman.

About seven o'clock in the evening the boatman had ferried over a lady enveloped in a dark cloak, who seemed to be exceedingly anxious to escape recognition; but precisely on account of her precautions he had been the more observant and had discovered that she was young and pretty.

There were then, as now, crowds of young and pretty women who came to St. Cloud and who had reasons for desiring to remain unrecognized, yet D'Artagnan doubted not for an instant that it was Madame Bonancieux the ferryman had brought over.

D'Artagnan took advantage of the lamp in the ferryman's cottage to read Madame Bonancieux's note once more and to assure himself that he had made no mistake —that the appointment was really at St. Cloud and not elsewhere, and in front of the pavilion of M. d'Estrees and not in another street.

Everything concurred to prove to D'Artagnan that his presentiments did not deceive him, and that some great misfortune had actually occurred.

He ran back toward the castle, fancying that during

his absence something new might have taken place at the pavilion, and that some fresh developments might be there awaiting him.

The lane was still deserted, and the same calm, soft light streamed from the window.

D'Artagnan then thought of that dark and miserable little cottage, which doubtless had beheld, and might, perhaps, also speak.

The gate of the inclosure was shut, but he jumped over the hedge, and, in spite of the barking of the chained dog, approached the cottage.

At his first summons no one answered. A death-like silence prevailed here, as well as in the pavilion; yet, as this cottage was his last resource, he persisted.

Now he fancied he heard a slight noise within—a timid noise, which seemed to be afraid of being heard.

Then D'Artagnan ceased to knock, and entreated in such a piteous accent of fear, mingled with flattery, that his voice would have reassured the most timorous.

At length one worm-eaten shutter was opened, or rather half opened, and instantly shut again, as soon as the light of a miserable lamp, which was burning in a corner, had disclosed the belt, the handle of the sword, and the pistols of D'Artagnan. And yet, quick as had been the movement, he had been able to see the head of an old man.

"In the name of Heaven," said he, "listen to me! I expected some one who has not come. I am dying from anxiety. Has any misfortune happened in your neighborhood? Speak!"

The window was again slowly opened and the same countenance reappeared, only it was even paler than before.

D'Artagnan told his story simply, merely withholding names; he stated that he had an appointment with a young lady in front of the pavilion, and that not seeing her he had climbed the linden tree, and had by the light of the lamp perceived the disorder of the room.

The old man listened attentively, with many signs of

assent, and when D'Artagnan had ended, shook his head in a manner which boded no good.

"What do you mean?" exclaimed D'Artagnan; "in the name of Heaven, explain yourself!"

"Oh, sir," said he, "do not ask me anything; for if I should tell you what I have seen, most assuredly harm will befall me."

"You have seen something, then?" exclaimed D'Artagnan. "In that case, in Heaven's name," continued he, throwing him a pistole, "tell me what you have seen, and, on the honor of a gentleman, not one of your words shall pass my lips."

The old man read so much frankness and anxiety in D'Artagnan's countenance that he made him a sign to listen, and said, in a low voice:

"It was about nine o'clock that I heard some noise in the street, and wishing to know what it was I was going to my gate, when I saw some people trying to get in. As I am poor and have no fear of being robbed, I went to open the gate and saw three men a few paces from me. In the shadow stood a carriage, with horses harnessed and also some led horses. These led horses evidently belonged to the three men, who were dressed for riding.

"'Ah, my good sirs,' I cried, 'what do you want?'

"'You must have a ladder,' said one, who appeared to be the leader of the party.

"'Yes, sir; the one with which I gather my fruit.'

"'Give it to us and go back into your house; and here is a crown for the trouble we give you. But, remember, if you say one word of what you see or hear—for, however we may threaten you, I am sure you will both hear and see all that we do—you are a lost man.'

"At these words he threw me a crown, which I picked up, and they took my ladder. In fact, having fastened the gate of the hedge after them, I pretended to enter my house; but I went out again by the back door, and gliding in the shade, I hid myself in yonder alder-bushes from the shelter of which I could see everything without being seen myself.

"The three men had brought up the carriage without any noise; they pulled out of it a fat, short, gray little man, shabbily dressed in a sad-colored doublet, who carefully mounted the ladder, looked sulkily into the window, came down with a wolf's steps, and muttered in a low voice, 'It is she!'

"He who had spoken to me immediately went to the door of the pavilion, which he opened with a key he took out of his pocket, and then shut the door again and disappeared.

"The other two men mounted the ladder at the same time. The little old man remained at the carriage door, the coachman took care of his horses, and a lackey of the led ones. Suddenly great outcries resounded from the pavilion and a woman ran to the window and opened it as if to throw herself out. But as soon as she saw the two men she threw herself back, and the two men rushed after her into the chamber.

"Then I saw nothing more, but I heard the noise of breaking furniture. The woman screamed and cried for help, but her cries were soon stifled. The three men returned to the window, carrying the woman in their arms, and two of them came down the ladder and bore her to the carriage, into which the little old man entered with her. He who had remained in the pavilion shut the window, came out at the door directly after, and satisfied himself that the woman was in the carriage; his two companions were already on their horses waiting for him; he sprang into the saddle and the lackey took his place beside the coachman; the carriage, escorted by the three horsemen, departed at a gallop, and all was over. From that moment until your arrival I have neither seen nor heard anything."

D'Artagnan, overwhelmed by these terrible tidings, remained motionless and speechless, whilst the demons of jealousy and anger raged in his heart.

"But, my good gentleman," said the old man, on whom this mute despair had more effect than would have been produced by cries and tears, "do not de-

spond; they have not killed her—that is the chief thing."

"Do you know at all," said D'Artagnan, "who is the man who led this infernal expedition?"

"I do not know him."

"But, as he spoke to you, you could see him?"

"Ah! you want to know what he was like?"

"Yes."

"A tall, lean, brown man, with black mustaches, a dark eye, and the look of a gentleman."

"That's the man!" cried D'Artagnan; "once more! The same man—always the same! It is my demon apparently. And the other?"

"Which?"

"The little one."

"Oh, *he* was not a gentleman. I'll answer for that. Besides, he did not carry a sword, and the others treated him with no sort of respect."

"Some servant," muttered D'Artagnan. "Ah! poor woman! poor woman! what have they done with her?"

"You promised to be secret," said the old man.

"And I renew my promise. Be satisfied! I am a gentleman; a gentleman has only his word; I have given you mine."

D'Artagnan returned toward the ferry, almost heart-broken. Sometimes he could hardly believe it was Madame Bonancieux, and hoped to find her the next day at the Louvre. Sometimes he fancied that she had an intrigue with another and had been discovered and carried off by some one who was jealous of him. He doubted, sorrowed, and despaired.

"Oh!" cried he, "if I had but my friends here! I should at any rate have some hope of finding her; but Heaven only knows what has become of them all."

It was then nearly midnight and he must at once find Planchet. D'Artagnan searched successively every wine-shop where he perceived a little light, but nowhere could he find his servant.

At length, after examining half a dozen, he began to

reflect that the search was rather hazardous. He had himself appointed six o'clock in the morning; therefore, wherever Planchet was, he was justified.

Besides, it occurred to the young man that by remaining in the neighborhood of the place where this event had happened, he might gather some information. At the sixth wine-shop, as we have said, he remained, therefore, and asking for a bottle of their best wine, placed himself in the darkest corner and determined there to await the return of day. But this time, too, his hopes were disappointed; and, although he opened his ears to every sound, he heard nothing—amidst the oaths and gestures and abuse which were exchanged between the workmen, lackeys, and cab-drivers, who conposed the honorable society of which ne formed part—that could put him at all upon the track of the poor ill-used woman. He was obliged, therefore, after having emptied his bottle, and in order that he might avoid remark, to occupy himself in seeking for the easiest posture in which to sleep as best he could. It must be remembered that D'Artagnan was not twenty years old, and at that age sleep has inalienable rights which it imperiously claims, even from desolate hearts.

About six o'clock in the morning D'Artagnan awoke with that feeling of discomfort that generally comes with the break of day after an uneasy night. His toilet did not occupy him long; and having felt his pockets to see that no one had taken advantage of his sleep to rob him, and found his diamond safe on his finger, his purse untouched, and his pistols in his belt, he paid for his wine and sallied forth to try whether he should be more fortunate in the search for his servant in the morning than he had been at night. And the first thing that he perceived, through the damp gray fog, was honest Planchet, who, with the two horses, was waiting for him at the door of a wretched little tumble-down wine-shop, before whose doors D'Artagnan had passed without even suspecting its existence.

CHAPTER XXV.

PORTHOS.

INSTEAD of returning directly home D'Artagnan dis mounted at M. de Treville's door and rapidly ascende the staircase. He was determined to tell him, this time all that had occurred. Doubtless he would give hin good advice in this affair, and as M. de Treville saw th queen almost daily, he might draw some informatio from her majesty concerning the poor woman, who wa unquestionably being punished for her devotion to he mistress.

M. de Treville listened to the young man's recital wit a gravity which proved that he saw something more i this adventure than a love affair, and when D'Artagna had finished:

"Hum!" said he, "this savors of Richelieu a mile off."

"But what am I to do?" said D'Artagnan.

"Nothing, absolutely nothing just now; but leav Paris, as I advised you, as soon as possible. I will se the queen, will tell her the details of the disappearanc of this poor woman, of which she is, doubtless, ignorant and these will guide her, on her side; and at you return I may have good news for you. Trust to me."

D'Artagnan knew that, although a Gascon, M. de Tre ville was not accustomed to make promises, and tha when by chance he did make one he always performe more than he promised. He therefore took his leave full of gratitude for the past and the future; and th worthy captain, who on his side felt a lively interes for this brave and resolute yonng man, affectionately grasped his hand as he wished him a safe journey.

Determined to put M. de Treville's advice into instan execution, D'Artagnan hastened toward the Rue des Fossoyeurs, to look to the packing of his portmanteau On approaching No. 11 he perceived M. Bonancieux, in his morning costume, standing at the door. Everything

that the prudent Planchet had said the evening before about the sinister character of the landlord now recurred to his mind, and he looked at him more attentively than he had ever done before. In fact, besides that yellow, sickly paleness, which indicates the infiltration of the bile into the blood, and which might be only accidental, D'Artagnan remarked something strangely surly and perfidious in the wrinkles of his face. A rascal does not laugh in the same manner as an honest man; a hypocrite does not weep the same class of tears as a man who is sincere. All imposture is a mask; and however well the mask may be molded, it may be always, with a little attention, distinguished from the natural face.

Now, it seemed to D'Artagnan that M. Bonancieux wore a mask and that this mask was a very disagreeable one.

He was going, therefore, from repugnance to the man, to pass by him without speaking, when M. Bonancieux, as on the previous day, addressed him.

"Well, young man," said he, "it seems that we are rather late of nights. Seven o'clock in the morning! Plague! It appears that you reverse customs, and come back home at the hour others go out."

"No one could throw that in your teeth, M. Bonancieux," said the young man; "you are a model of regularity. It is true that when one has a young and charming wife one need not run after happiness; happiness comes home to seek us, does it not, M. Bonancieux?"

Bonancieux became pale as death and grinned a horrible smile

"Ah! ah! you are a pleasant fellow. But where the plague have you been running this night, my young master? It appears as if the by-lanes were rather dirty."

D'Artagnan lowered his eyes to his own boots, which were covered with mud, but in doing this he happened to look at the shoes and stockings of the mercer; one

would have said that they had been dipped in the same slough, for both were stained with spots of exactly the same appearance.

A sudden idea came across D'Artagnan's mind. That little, fat, gray, short man, like a lackey, clothed in a sad-colored suit, and treated with no sort of respect by the swordsmen of the escort, was Bonancieux himself. The husband had assisted in the abduction of his wife.

A strong desire seized D'Artagnan to fly at the mercer's throat and strangle him, but we have said that he was a prudent youth, and he restrained himself. Nevertheless the change of his countenance was so visible that Bonancieux was frightened and endeavored to retreat a step or two; but he was standing exactly before the half of the door that was closed, and the material obstacle which he thus encountered compelled him to keep his place.

"Ah!" said D'Artagnan, "you who joke in this manner, my brave fellow, it appears to me, that if my boots need a rub of the sponge, your shoes also want a brush. And have you been rambling, too, Master Bonancieux? By my faith, it would be quite unpardonable in a man of your age and who, moreover, has got a wife so pretty as yours is."

"Oh! my God, no!" said Bonancieux; "but yesterday I went to St. Mandé to gain some information concerning a servant, whom I cannot do without; and as the roads were dirty I have collected all this mud, which I have not yet had time to get rid of."

The place which Bonancieux had mentioned as the end of his journey was a new proof in confirmation to the suspicion that D'Artagnan had formed. Bonancieux had said St. Mandé, because St. Mandé was in an exactly opposite direction from St. Cloud.

This probability was the first consolation he had found. If Bonancieux knew where his wife was, it would always be possible, by using extreme measures, to force the mercer to unclose his teeth and let out his secret. The main point was to change this probability into certainty

"Pardon me, my dear M. Bonancieux," said D'Artagnan, "if I treat you without ceremony, but nothing makes me so thirsty as want of sleep, hence I have a furious thirst. Allow me to beg a glass of water of you; I am sure you will not refuse such a little thing to your lodger."

And without waiting for his landlord's leave, D'Artagnan entered the house and cast a hasty glance at the bed. The bed was undisturbed—Bonancieux had not slept in it. He had therefore only returned an hour or two before, having accompanied his wife to the place where they had conducted her, or, at any rate, the first stage.

"Thank you, M. Bonancieux," said D'Artagnan, emptying the glass, "that is all I wanted of you. Now I will go home; I am going to make Planchet brush my boots, and when he has finished them I will send him, if you like, to brush yours too."

He left the mercer quite stupefied by this singular adieu, and wondering whether he had not run his own neck into a noose.

At the top of the stairs he found Planchet, frightened out of his wits.

"Ah, sir," cried the lackey, as soon as he saw his master; "here, indeed, is something new, and you seem to me a long time returning."

"What is the matter now?" demanded D'Artagnan.

"Ah! I will give you leave to guess a hundred, nay, a thousand times, before you name the visitor I have received for you during your absence."

"When was that?"

"About half an hour ago, while you were with M. de Treville."

"And who has been here? Come, speak!"

"M. de Cavois."

"M. de Cavois?"

"Yes, in person."

"The captain of the cardinal's guards?"

"Himself."

"He came to arrest me?"

"I suspected so, sir, in spite of his wheedling way."

"He had a wheedling way, do you say?"

"That is to say, he was all honey, sir."

"Really!"

"He said he came from his eminence, who had the greatest kindness towards you, to beg you to follow him to the Palais Royal."

"And you answered him?"

"That the thing was impossible, seeing that you were from home, as he might perceive."

"And what did he say?"

"That you must not fail to go there some time during the day, and then he added in a whisper, 'tell your master that his eminence is perfectly well disposed toward him and that his fortune probably depends upon this interview.'"

"The snare is clumsy enough for the cardinal," said the young man, smiling.

"And as I discovered the snare, I told him that you would be quite in despair on your return."

"'Where is he gone?' demanded M. de Cavois. 'To Troyes, in Champagne,' I answered. 'And when did he go?' 'Yesterday evening.'"

"Planchet, my friend," interrupted D'Artagnan, "you are truly a valuable man."

"You understand, sir, I thought that it would be time enough, if you wished to see M. de Cavois, to give myself the lie by saying that you had *not* gone. It would then be Planchet who had told the lie, and as I am not a gentleman I may tell lies, you know."

"Be easy, Planchet, you shall preserve your reputation as a truth-teller; in a quarter of an hour we will be off."

"It was just the advice I was going to offer you, sir. And where are we going now, if it is not being too curious?"

"Egad! exactly the opposite way to that which you said I was gone. Besides, have you not as much anxiety

to know what has become of Grimaud, Musqueton and Bazin as I have to hear of Athos, Porthos and Aramis ? "

" Yes, indeed, sir," said Planchet, " and we will set off as soon as you please. The air of the country, I believe, will suit us both better than the air of Paris, just now. Therefore——"

" Therefore prepare the baggage, Planchet, and let us be off. I will march off first, with my hands in my pockets, that there may be no suspicion. You will join me at the Hôtel des Gardes. Apropos, Planchet, I believe that you are right regarding our landlord, and that he is no better than a damnable villain."

" Ah ! believe me, sir, when I tell you anything ; I am a physiognomist ! "

D'Artagnan descended first, as was agreed ; and that he might have nothing to reproach himself with he again went to the lodgings of his three friends, but no intelligence of them had been received—only a perfumed letter, elegantly written, had arrived for Aramis. D'Artagnan took charge of it. Ten minutes afterwards Planchet joined him at the stables. D'Artagnan, in order that no time might be lost, had already saddled his own horse.

" That will do," said he to Planchet, when he had fastened on the saddle-bags. " Now saddle the other three and let us be off."

" Do you believe we shall travel faster with two horses apiece ? " asked Planchet, with his sharp look.

" No, Master Clown," replied D'Artagnan, " but with our four horses we may bring our three friends back—that is, if we can find them."

" Which would be a great chance," replied Planchet ; " but we must not mistrust the all-merciful Providence."

" Amen ! " said D'Artagnan, bestriding his horse.

They left the Hôtel des Gardes by opposite ends of the street, as the one was to quit Paris by the barrier of La Villette, the other by the barrier of Montmartre, to rejoin each other at St. Denis—a strategic manœuver, which, being punctually executed, was crowned with the

happiest results. Thus D'Artagnan and Planchet entered Pierrefitte together.

Planchet, it must be confessed, was more courageous by day than by night. But yet his natural prudence did not forsake him for an instant; he had forgotten none of the incidents of the former journey, and took every one for an enemy whom they encountered on the road. On this account he almost carried his hat in his hand, for which he was severely rebuked by D'Artagnan, who feared that this excess of politeness might cause him to be taken for the valet of a man of little or no consequence.

Nevertheless, whether the passengers were really softened by Planchet's extreme urbanity, or whether no enemies were stationed on their path, our two travelers arrived without any accident at Chantilly, and dismounted at the tavern of the Great St. Martin, the same at which they had stopped upon their last journey.

The landlord, seeing a young man followed by a servant and two led horses, advanced respectfully. Now, as he had already traveled eleven leagues, D'Artagnan judged that they had better stop here, whether Porthos was at the hotel or not. But it might not be prudent, at first, to make any inquiries about the musketeer. The result of these reflections was, that D'Artagnan, without asking any information from anybody, dismounted, recommended the horses to the servant's care, and entering a small room reserved for those who wished to be alone, called for a bottle of the best wine and as good a breakfast as the landlord could supply—a call which corroborated the good opinion the innkeeper had already formed of his guest at first sight.

D'Artagnan was served with a celerity quite miraculous. The regiment of guards was composed of the first gentlemen in the realm, and D'Artagnan, traveling with a servant and four splendid horses, could hardly fail to create a sensation, in spite of the simplicity of his uniform. The host wished to wait on him himself, seeing

which D'Artagnan made him bring two glasses, and began the following conversation:

"By my faith, mine host," said D'Artagnan, filling two glasses, "I have asked for the best wine, and if you have deceived me your sin will bring its punishment along with it, since, as I hate to drink alone, you are going to drink with me. Take this glass, then, and let us drink. What health shall we drink, that we may wound no one's feelings? Let us drink to the prosperity of your establishment!"

"Your lordship does me great honor and I sincerely thank you for your good wishes."

"But don't deceive yourself," said D'Artagnan; "there is more selfishness in my toast than you think of. It is only in prosperous houses that one gets well treated; in tottering inns everything runs to disorder, and the traveler is the victim of landlords' embarrassments. Now, as I travel a good deal and particularly on this road, I should like to see all the innkeepers making a fortune."

"In fact," said the landlord, "it appears to me that this is not the first time I have seen you, sir."

"Bah! I have passed through Chantilly perhaps ten times and have stopped at least three or four times at your house. Yes, I was here about ten or twelve days ago, conducting three of my friends, musketeers; and one of them, by-the-bye, quarreled with a stranger here—a man who sought a quarrel with him."

"Ah! yes, true!" said mine host; "I recollect it perfectly. Is it not of M. Porthos that your lordship speaks?"

"That is the very name of my traveling companion. Good God! My dear landlord, tell me, has any misfortune befallen him?"

"But your lordship must have remarked that he was not able to continue his journey."

"In fact, he promised to overtake us, but we saw nothing more of him."

"He has done us the honor to remain here."

"What! he has done you the honor to remain here?"

"Yes, sir, in this hotel; and we are somewhat uneas at it."

"Why?"

"On account of certain expenses that he has incurred."

"Well, but the expenses he has incurred he will pay."

"Ah, sir, your words are nothing less than a balm t my heart. We have been at considerable expense o his account, and only this morning the surgeon declare that if M. Porthos did not pay him he should proceed against me, as it was I who sent for him."

"But is Porthos wounded, then?"

"I cannot tell you, sir."

"What! you cannot tell me? You ought at any rate to know better about it than anybody else."

"Yes; but in our business we do not tell all we know, sir—particularly wnen we have been warned that our ears shall answer for our tongue."

"Well! can I see Porthos?"

"Certainly, sir. Go to the first landing-place on the staircase and knock at No. 1. Only caution him that it is you."

"What! caution him that it is I?"

"Yes; some accident might happen else."

"And what accident could happen to me?"

"M. Porthos might mistake you for somebody belonging to the house and might, in a fit of passion, either run you through with his sword or blow out your brains."

"Why, what have you been doing to him, then?"

"Oh! we asked him for money."

"Ah, I comprehend all now. That is a kind of demand that Porthos always receives badly when he is not in cash; but I know that he ought to have plenty."

"So we all thought, sir. And as my house is very regular and as our accounts are made up every week, on the eighth day we presented our little bill; but we seem to have hit upon an unlucky moment, for at the first word we dropped upon the subject he swore us to the very devil. It is true he had been playing the evening before."

"What! playing the evening before? And with whom?"

"Oh! good Lord, who can tell that? With some nobleman who was traveling this way and to whom he sent to propose a game at lansquenet."

"Just so; and the unlucky dog lost his all."

"Even to his horse, sir; for when the stranger was about to leave we perceived that his servant was saddling M. Porthos's horse, and we remarked it to him; but he told us that we had better interfere only in our own concerns and that the horse was his. So we went immediately to let M. Porthos know what was going on, but he only answered that we were scoundrels for doubting the word of a gentleman, and that as this one had said that the horse belonged to him it must necessarily be true."

"I recognize him in that exactly," muttered D'Artagnan.

"Then," continued the innkeeper, "I sent a message to him that, as we did not seem likely to come to any understanding with one another about payment, I hoped that he would at least have the kindness to transfer the favor of his custom to my brother landlord at the Golden Eagle, but M. Porthos replied that, as my hotel was the better of the two, he had decided to remain where he was. This answer was too complimentary for me to insist upon his leaving. I contented myself with begging him to resign his apartment, which is the most beautiful in the house, and to be satisfied with a pretty little room upon the third floor. But to this M. Porthos replied that he was every moment expecting his mistress, who was one of the highest ladies at court; and that I ought to understand that the chamber which he did me the honor to occupy in my house was but a poor place enough for such a visitor. Nevertheless, though partly recognizing the truth of what he said, I felt it my duty to insist; but without giving himself the trouble to enter into any discussion with me he put a pistol on his night-table and declared that at the first word which

might be said to him about any moving whatsoever either out of the house or in it, he would blow out the brains of the person who had been imprudent enough to interfere in what did not concern him. So since that time, sir, nobody has once entered his room but his own servant."

"Ah! Musqueton is here, is he?"

"Yes, sir. Five days after his departure he came back in a very ill-humor; it seems that he also had met with some unpleasantness on his way. And, unfortunately, he is rather more nimble than his master, so that he turns everything topsy-turvy, and under the supposition that we might refuse him what he asks for, takes anything he wants without asking at all."

"The fact is," replied D'Artagnan, "that I have always remarked in Musqueton a very superior intelligence and zeal."

"Possibly so, sir; but if I should only find myself four times in a year in contact with similar intelligence and zeal, I should be a ruined man."

"No! Porthos will pay you."

"Hum!" exclaimed the innkeeper, in a tone of doubt.

"He is the favorite of a lady of rank, who will not allow him to remain in trouble on account of such a trifle as he owes you."

"If I only dared to say what I think about that."

"What do you think?"

"I might say more—things I know."

"What you know?"

"Or even I am quite sure of!"

"And what are you so sure of? Come, let us hear!"

"I should say that I know this lady of rank."

"You!"

"Yes, I."

"And how came you to know her?"

"Oh, sir, if I thought I could depend on your discretion."

"Speak; and on the word of a gentleman you shall have no occasion to regret your confidence."

"Well, sir, you can understand that financial uneasiness makes one do many things."

"What have you done?"

"Oh! nothing but what a creditor has a right to do."

"Well?"

"M. Porthos had handed us a note for his duchess, giving us orders to put it in the post. It was before his own servant came, and as he could not leave his room he was obliged to employ us in his commissions."

"What next?"

"Instead of putting this letter in the post, which is never very safe, we took advantage of the opportunity of one of our waiters going to Paris, and instructed him to deliver the letter to this duchess herself. That was fulfilling the intentions of M. Porthos, who had particularly enjoined us to be careful of the letter, was it not?"

"Nearly so."

"Well, sir, do you know what this lady of rank is?"

"No. I have heard Porthos speak of her, that is all."

"Do you know what this pretended duchess is?"

"I tell you again, I don't know her."

"She is an attorney's wife, sir—an old woman called Madame Coquenard, who is at least fifty years of age and yet takes upon herself to be jealous. It seemed very strange to me, a duchess living in the Rue aux Ours!"

"How do you know this?"

"Because she put herself in a great passion on receiving the letter, saying that M. Porthos was a fickle man and that it was for some woman that he had received this sword-thrust."

"Then he was wounded!" cried D'Artagnan.

"Ah, my God! what have I said?" exclaimed the innkeeper.

"You said that M. Porthos had received a wound from a sword."

"Yes; but he strongly enjoined me to say nothing about it."

"And why?"

"Plague, sir! because he boasted that he would perforate the stranger with whom you left him in a dispute; whilst, on the contrary, this stranger, in spite of his rodomontades, stretched him on the turf. Now, as M. Porthos is a very vainglorious man, except toward his duchess, whom he thought to soften by an account of his adventure, he is not disposed to admit to anybody that he is suffering from a wound."

"It's a sword-wound, then, that keeps him in his bed?"

"And a masterly one, I assure you. Your friend's soul must be absolutely pinned to his body."

"Were you there, then?"

"I followed them, sir, from curiosity, so that I saw the combat, without the combatants seeing me."

"And how did it happen?"

"Oh, the thing did not take long, I assure you. They put themselves on guard; the stranger made a feint and lunged, and that so rapidly that, when M. Porthos parried, he had already three inches of steel in his chest. He fell back; the stranger put his sword to his throat, and M. Porthos, seeing himself at the mercy of his adversary, confessed himself vanquished. The stranger then asked his name, and hearing that he was M. Porthos and not M. d'Artagnan, offered him his arm, led him back to the hotel, mounted his horse and disappeared."

"Then it was M. d'Artagnan that the stranger was after?"

"It appears so."

"And do you know what has become of him?"

"No; I had never seen him before that moment and we have not seen him since."

"Very well, I know all I want. And you say that M. Porthos's chamber is on the first floor, No. 1?"

"Yes, sir, the handsomest in the house—a chamber which I might have let a dozen times."

"Bah! don't be unhappy," said D'Artagnan, laughing; "Porthos will pay you with the money of Her Grace the Duchess of Coquenard."

"Oh, sir, attorney's wife or duchess would be no matter to me, if she would but undo her purse-strings; but she has positively said that she is tired out by the inconstancies and exigencies of M. Porthos, and that she will not send him even a sou."

"And did you communicate this reply to your guest?"

"No, we were not so silly. He would have found out the fashion in which we had executed our commission."

"Then he is still in expectation of the money?"

"Oh, Lord! yes. He wrote again yesterday; but his own servant this time took the letter to the post."

"You say the attorney's wife is old and ugly?"

"Fifty years of age, at least, sir, and far from handsome, from what Pathaud says."

"Be comforted, then. Her heart will melt toward him; and, at any rate, Porthos cannot owe you much."

"What! not much? It is twenty pistoles already, without reckoning the surgeon. Oh! he denies himself nothing; it is plain that he has been always accustomed to live well."

"Well, even if the duchess should fail him, he will find friends, I can assure you. So, my dear landlord, do not disturb yourself, and continue to be most attentive to his comfort."

"You have promised me, sir, not to say a word about the attorney's wife or the wound."

"That is settled—you have my word."

"Oh! he would kill me if he knew!"

"Do not be afraid; he is not half such a devil as he says he is."

Saying these words, D'Artagnan mounted the stairs, leaving the landlord a little reassured concerning two things about which he appeared to think a great deal—his money and his life.

At the top of the stairs, D'Artagnan found on the most conspicuous door of the corridor a gigantic No. 1, marked with black ink. At this door he knocked, and being invited to do so from within, entered the room.

Porthos was lying down and playing at lansquenet

with Musqueton, to keep his hands in, whilst a spit, burdened with partridges, was turning before the fire, and at the two corners of an immense chimney there were boiling on two chafing-dishes, two saucepans from which exhaled the double odor of a fricassee of fowls, and a hotch-potch of fish which delighted the olfactory nerves. Besides, the top of a desk and the marble slab of a side-table were covered with empty bottles.

At sight of his friend Porthos uttered a loud and joyful cry, whilst Musqueton, rising respectfully, gave up his place to him and went to glance into the two saucepans, of which he appeared to have particular charge.

"Ah! egad! it is you!" said Porthos. "Welcome, welcome! Excuse me for not rising to meet you, but," added he, looking with some anxiety at D'Artagnan, "you know what has happened to me?"

"No."

"Has the innkeeper told you nothing?"

"I asked for you and came up directly."

Porthos appeared to breathe more freely.

"And what has happened to you, then, my dear Porthos?" said D'Artagnan.

"It happened that, in lunging at my adversary, to whom I had already given three sword-wounds and whom I wished to finish by a fourth, my foot caught against a stone and I sprained my knee."

"Truly?"

"Yes, upon my honor! Lucky it was for the rascal, too, for I should otherwise have left him dead upon the spot, I assure you."

"And what became of him?"

"Oh, I know nothing about that; he had had quite enough of it and went away without asking for the remainder. But you, my dear D'Artagnan, how have things gone with you?"

"So, that," continued D'Artagnan, "it is this sprain that keeps you in bed, my dear Porthos?"

"Ah, indeed, yes; that is all; but in a few days I shall be on my legs again."

"But why did not you get yourself removed to Paris? you must have been sadly dull here."

"Such was my intention; but, my dear friend, I must confess one thing to you."

"And what is that?"

"It is, that as I became cruelly dull, as you say, and as I had in my pocket the seventy-five pistoles with which you provided me, I invited up a passing traveler and proposed to him a game of dice. He agreed, and, faith, my seventy-five pistoles passed from my pocket into his, without reckoning my horse, which he carried off into the bargain. But you, my dear D'Artagnan?"

"What would you have, my dear Porthos? You cannot be favored in all your pursuits," said D'Artagnan. "You know the proverb—'lose at play and win at love.' You are too fortunate in love for play not to revenge itself. But what do these changes of fortune signify to you? Happy dog! have you not still got your duchess to assist you?"

"Well! look, my dear D'Artagnan, how unlucky I am," replied Porthos, in the most unconcerned way in the world. "I have written to her to send me some fifty louis, for which I have particular need in my present position."

"Well?"

"Well! She must be gone to her estate, for as yet she has sent me no reply."

"Really?"

"No; so I sent a second letter yesterday, rather more pressing than the first. But, my dear fellow, let us talk about your own affairs. I confess I was beginning to feel much uneasiness on your account."

"But your host has behaved pretty well to you, apparently," said D'Artagnan, pointing to the teeming stew-pans and the empty bottles.

"So, so!" replied Porthos; "it is two or three days ago now since the impudent fellow brought me up his bill, and I showed them the door—both himself and his bill, so that I am now living here in something of the

style of a conqueror. And, as you see, being somewhat afraid of being attacked in my entrenchments, I am armed to the very teeth."

"Nevertheless," said D'Artagnan, laughing, "it seems that you sometimes make sorties."

And he pointed to the stew-pans and the bottles.

"It is not me, unfortunately," said Porthos. "This miserable sprain keeps me in my bed; but Musqueton, there, forages the country for supplies. Musqueton, my friend," continued Porthos, "you see that a reinforcement has arrived; we shall want an addition to our rations."

"Musqueton," said D'Artagnan, "there is a service you must do for me."

"What is it, sir?"

"To give your recipe to Planchet. I may chance to be besieged myself, hereafter, and I should not be at all sorry to enjoy all the luxuries with which you gratify your master."

"Oh, sir," said Musqueton, modestly, "nothing is more easy. One must be a little light-fingered—that is all. I was brought up in the country, and my father, in his leisure moments, was somewhat of a poacher."

"And how was he occupied in the other part of his time?"

"He was engaged in a pursuit, sir, which I have always found a very happy one."

"What was that?"

"As it was in the time of the wars between the Catholics and Huguenots, and as he saw Catholics exterminating Huguenots and Huguenots exterminating Catholics, all in the name of religion, he had made for himself a sort of mixed belief, which permitted him to be at one time a Catholic and at another a Huguenot. He had a habit of walking out behind the hedges on the roadside with his carbine on his shoulder, and when he saw a solitary Catholic coming, the Protestant religion immediately predominated in his mind; he lowered his carbine in the direction of the traveler, and then, when he was at

ten paces from him, opened a conversation which almost always ended by the traveler relinquishing his purse to redeem his life. Of course, when he saw a Huguenot coming he was seized with such an ardent Catholic zeal that he could not comprehend how it had been possible for him, only a quarter of an hour before, to doubt the superiority of our most holy faith. For my part, sir, I am a Catholic, my father having, in conformity with his principles, made my elder brother a Huguenot."

"And what was the end of the worthy man?" asked D'Artagnan.

"Most unfortunate, sir. He found himself caught in a hollow way, between a Catholic and a Huguenot, with whom he had done some business previously, and they both recognized him; so they joined company against him and hung him to a tree. And then they came and boasted of their foolish work in the very wine-shop in the village where my brother and I were drinking."

"And what did you do?" asked D'Artagnan.

"We let them talk," replied Musqueton. "Then, as they went opposite roads when they left the wine-shop, my brother posted himself in the path of the Catholic and I lay in wait for the Protestant. It was all settled in two hours after; we had done their business, admiring the forethought of our poor father, who had taken the precaution to educate us each in a different faith."

"In fact, as you say, Musqueton, your father seems to have been a very intelligent fellow. And you tell me that the worthy man was, in his spare time, that is to say, a poacher?"

"Yes, sir; and it was he who taught me to set a gin and fix a ground-line. The consequence was that, when I found our shabby landlord was feeding us on coarse meats, fit, possibly, for clowns, but not at all suitable to stomachs so high-strung as ours, I had recourse once more to my old trade. As I sauntered through the woods I laid my snares in the paths, and as I reclined beside the water I slipped my lines into the ponds. In this way, thank God, we have experienced no scarcity,

as you may be satisfied, sir, of partridges or rabbits, or of carps or eels; and these are light and wholesome viands, highly suitable nourishment for a sick man."

"But wine," said D'Artagnan. "Your landlord furnishes the wine?"

"That is to say," answered Musqueton, "yes and no."

"What! yes and no?"

"He furnishes it, it is true, but he is not aware that he has that honor."

"Explain yourself, Musqueton; your conversation is full of instruction."

"This is the way of it: it chanced that in my wanderings I met with a Spaniard, who had seen many countries, and, amongst others, the New World."

"And what connection can there be between the New World and those bottles on the desk and drawers?"

"Patience, sir, and everything will come in turn."

"That is fair, Musqueton. I trust to you and listen."

"This Spaniard had a servant, who had accompanied him on a voyage to Mexico. This servant was a fellow-countryman of mine and we became attached to one another the more quickly as our characters were much alike. We were both particularly fond of hunting, and he related to me how, in the Pampas, the natives hunt tigers and bulls, simply with nooses of rope, which they throw over the necks of these terrible animals. At first I would not believe that they could attain so great a degree of address as to throw the end of a rope on what they wished, at the distance of twenty or thirty paces. But with the proof before me I was obliged to recognize the truth of his recital. My friend placed a bottle at thirty paces off and at each throw caught it by the neck in a slip-knot. I practiced this exercise, and as nature has given me some capacity, I can now throw the lasso as well as any man in the world. Well? Do you understand? Our landlord has a well-furnished cellar, of which he never loses sight of the key. But this cellar has an air-hole, and through that air-hole I throw the lasso; and as I now know the best corner, I always draw from

one particular bin. This is the connection, sir, between the New World and the bottles on the desk and drawers. And now, will you taste our wine and, without prejudice, tell us what you think of it ? "

" Thanks, my friend, thanks ! But I have already breakfasted."

" Well," said Porthos, " make all ready, Musqueton, and whilst we breakfast D'Artagnan will tell us what has happened to him during the ten days that he has been away."

Whilst Porthos and Musqueton breakfasted with all the appetite of convalescents and that brotherly cordiality which draws men together in misfortune, D'Artagnan related that Aramis, being wounded, had been obliged to stop at Crevecœur ; that he had left Athos fighting at Amiens with four men who accused him of being a coiner, and that he himself had been compelled to run the Count de Wardes through the body in order to reach England.

But there the confidence of D'Artagnan ended ; he merely announced that on his return from England he had brought four splendid horses with him, one for himself and one for each of his companions, and he concluded by informing Porthos that the one destined for him was already in the stables of the hotel.

At this moment Planchet entered ; he intimated to his master that the horses were sufficiently refreshed and that it would be possible to proceed and sleep at Clermont.

As D'Artagnan was pretty well satisfied concerning Porthos's state, and was anxious to gain some information of his other two friends, he gave his hand to the invalid and told him that he should now proceed with his researches. And as he expected to return by the same road, if Porthos, in seven or eight days, was still at the hotel of the Great St. Martin, he would take him up on his way.

Porthos answered that in all probability his sprain would confine him until that time ; and, moreover, he must wait at Chantilly for a reply from the duchess.

D'Artagnan wished him a speedy and favorable answer and after having again commended him to the care of Musqueton and paid the landlord his own expenses, he once more took the road with Planchet, who was already relieved of one of the led horses.

CHAPTER XXVI.

THE THESIS OF ARAMIS.

D'Artagnan had said nothing to Porthos either about his wound or about the attorney's wife. Young as he was, our Béarnese was a remarkably discreet youth. Consequently, he had pretended to believe everything the boasting musketeer had told him, convinced that no friendship can support a secret discovered, especially when that secret wounds the pride, since we always have a certain moral superiority over those with whose frailties we are acquainted. In his plans for the future, resolved as he was to make his three friends the instruments of his success, D'Artagnan was not sorry to sort between his fingers those invisible threads by the aid of which he meant to lead them.

Nevertheless, throughout the whole of his journey, an overwhelming sadness hung upon his heart; he thought of the young and pretty Madame Bonancieux, who was to have bestowed upon him the reward of his devotion. Let us, however, at once declare that the young man's melancholy was not so much a regret for his own lost enjoyment as a dread that something unfortunate had befallen the missing woman. He had not himself a doubt that she was a victim of the cardinal's vengeance; and it was well known that his eminence's revenge was always terrible. But how had he found pardon in the eyes of the minister? This was what he did not know himself, but what M. de Cavois, the captain of the guard, would undoubtedly have communicated to him had he found him at home.

Nothing passes the time or shortens the path like a thought which engrosses all the faculties of an individual's organization. Our external existence is as a sleep, of which this thought is the dream; and whilst we are subjected to its influence we lose sight of measurements, nor does there seem any distance in space; we leave one place and arrive at another and are conscious of nothing more. Of the intervening scenes the only remembrance preserved is akin to the idea of an indefinite mist, partially broken by obscure images of mountains, trees and plains. It was under the dominion of this hallucination that D'Artagnan passed over, at the pace that his horse pleased to take, the six or eight leagues which separated Chantilly from Crevecœur, without having on his arrival at the latter village any recollection of the sights he had encountered on the road. But there memory returned to him; he shook his head, perceived the tavern where he had left Aramis, and putting his horse into a trot, pulled up at the door.

It was not a landlord this time, but a landlady who received him. D'Artagnan, being somewhat of a physiognomist, examined, at a glance, the fat and good-humored face of the mistress of the place; this glance satisfied him that dissimulation on his part was unnecessary with her and that he had nothing to fear from such a happy looking countenance.

"My good lady," demanded D'Artagnan, "can you tell me what has become of one of my friends whom I was obliged to leave here about twelve days ago?"

"A handsome young man about twenty-three or twenty-four years of age, mild, amiable and well-made?"

"Exactly so; and, moreover, wounded in the shoulder."

"Just so. Well, he is still here."

"Ah, my dear lady," said D'Artagnan, springing from his horse and throwing the bridle to Planchet, "you give me life! Where is this dear Aramis? Let me embrace him, for I confess that I long to see him."

"Pardon me, sir, but I question whether he can see you at present."

"Why not? Is there a lady with him?"

"Oh, dear me, sir, what a question! Poor youth! No, sir, he has no lady with him."

"Who is he with, then?"

"With the curate of Montdidier and the superior of the Jesuits of Amiens."

"Good God!" exclaimed D'Artagnan, "is the poor young man so very ill?"

"No, sir, on the contrary. But toward the end of his illness he has been touched by grace and has determined on entering into holy orders."

"Ah, true!" said D'Artagnan; "I had forgotten that he was only a musketeer for a time."

"Do you still insist on seeing him, sir?"

"Oh, yes, more than ever."

"Well, then, you have only to take the left-hand staircase in the courtyard, to No. 5, on the second floor."

D'Artagnan followed these directions and found one of those outside staircases which may still be sometimes seen in the courtyards of old-fashioned inns. But it was no such easy matter to get admission to the future abbé. The avenues of Aramis's chamber were as strictly guarded as the gardens of Armida. Bazin was stationed in the corridor and barred the passage against him with the more intrepidity, as, after many years of trial, he saw himself at length on the eve of obtaining that distinction of which he had always been ambitious.

In fact, the dream of poor Bazin had ever been to serve a churchman, and he impatiently expected the so long anticipated moment when Aramis would at last throw off his military coat and adopt the cassock. It had only been by the daily reiteration of this promise, that he had been induced to continue in the service of the musketeer, in which, as he said, he could not fail to forfeit his salvation.

Bazin was consequently at the very apex of happiness. There was every probability that his master would not break his word this time. The union of physical and moral pain had produced the effect so long desired.

Aramis, suffering at once in mind and body, had at length fixed his thoughts and eyes upon religion; and he had regarded as a warning from Heaven the double accident which had befallen him—that is to say, the sudden disappearance of his mistress and the wound in his shoulder.

In such a mood it may be easily imagined that nothing could have been more disagreeable to Bazin than the appearance of D'Artagnan, which might again throw his master into the whirlwind of these worldly ideas, of which he had been so long the sport.

He resolved, therefore, to defend the door bravely; and as, betrayed by the landlady, he could not say that Aramis was out, he attempted to prove to the newcomer that it would be the height of impropriety to interrupt the pious conversation which his master had maintained since morning, and which, as Bazin added, could not be concluded before night.

But D'Artagnan paid no attention to Bazin's eloquent discourse; and not wishing to enter into a polemical discussion with his friend's valet, he simply put him aside with one hand and unfastened the door of No. 5 with the other.

The door opened and D'Artagnan entered the apartment.

Aramis, in a long black coat, and with his head incased in a kind of round flat cap, which was no bad representation of a skull-cap, was seated at a long table, covered with rolls of paper and enormous folios; on his right sat the superior of the Jesuits and on his left the curate of Montdidier. The curtains were half closed, giving entrance only to a subdued, mysterious light, appropriate to holy meditation. All those worldly objects which are apt to strike the eye in the chamber of a young man, and particularly when that young man is a musketeer, had disappeared as though by enchantment; and, doubtless, from a fear that a sight of them might recall his master's mundane predilections, Bazin had laid hands upon the sword, the pistols, the plumed hat, and embroidery and lace of every sort and kind.

But instead of these, D'Artagnan fancied he saw, in

an obscure corner, something like a cord of discipline dangling from a nail on the wall.

At the noise which D'Artagnan made on entering, Aramis raised his head and recognized his friend. But to the great surprise of the man, this sight did not seem to produce much impression on the musketeer, so much was his mind detached from all terrestrial affairs.

"How are you, my dear D'Artagnan?" said Aramis. "Believe me, I am glad to see you!"

"And I, also," said D'Artagnan; "although I am not quite sure that it is Aramis I am speaking to."

"The same, the same, my friend; but what could make you doubt it?"

"I thought I had made a mistake in the room and entered the chamber of a churchman. And then another terror seized me, when I found you in the company of these gentlemen—I feared you were dangerously ill."

The two men in black launched a glance almost of menace at D'Artagnan, whose intentions they divined; but he did not on that account disturb himself.

"Perhaps I inconvenience you, my dear Aramis," continued D'Artagnan; "for, from what I see, I am led to suppose that you are confessing to these gentlemen."

Aramis colored.

"Oh, no; on the contrary, my dear friend, and as a proof of it, permit me to swear to you that I rejoice at seeing you safe and sound!"

"Ah! he is coming to himself again," thought D'Artagnan; "this is fortunate."

"This gentleman, who is my friend, has just escaped a serious danger," continued Aramis, addressing the two ecclesiastics, as he pointed to D'Artagnan with his hand.

"Praise God for it, sir," replied they, bowing their heads in concert.

"I have not failed to do so, reverend fathers," replied the young man, as he returned their salutation.

"You have come just at the right time, my dear D'Artagnan," continued Aramis; "and by taking part in our discussion you will enlighten it by your ability.

M. the principal of Amiens, M. the curate of Montdidier, and myself are arguing certain theological questions which have long interested us and on which I shall be delighted to have your opinion."

"The opinion of a soldier has but little weight," replied D'Artagnan, who began to be uneasy at the turn things were taking; "you may rely upon the wisdom of these gentlemen."

The men in black bowed.

"On the contrary," replied Aramis, "your opinion will be of great value. The question is this: the principal thinks that my thesis should be, above all things, dogmatic and didactic."

"Your thesis! Are you preparing a thesis?"

"Certainly," replied the Jesuit; "for the examination preceding ordination a thesis is rigorously demanded."

"Ordination!" exclaimed D'Artagnan, who could scarcely yet believe what the landlady and Bazin had successively told him. "Ordination!" and his eyes wandered in astonishment over the three persons who were before him.

"Now," continued Aramis, fixing himself in his chair, in the same graceful manner as he would have done in the stall of a cathedral, and complacently examining his hand, which was as white and plump as that of a lady, and which he held in the air to make the blood flow downwards; "now, M. d'Artagnan, as you have heard, the principal would have my thesis dogmatic, whilst, for my own part, I think it ought to be ideal. It is on this account that the principal has proposed to me the following subject, which has never yet been treated of and in which I recognize matter susceptible of the most magnificent developments: '*Utrumque manus in benedicendo clericis inferioribus necessaria est.*'"

D'Artagnan, whose extent of erudition we are aware of, did not knit his brows at this citation any more than at that which M. de Treville had made to him on the occasion of the presents which he supposed D'Artagnan to have received from the Duke of Buckingham.

"Which means," resumed Aramis, in order to furnish him with every facility, "to the lower order of priest both hands are indispensable, when they give the bene diction."

"Admirably dogmatic," repeated the curate, whos knowledge of Latin was about equal to D'Artagnan's and who carefully watched the Jesuit, in order to kee pace with him and to repeat his words like an echo.

As for our young Gascon, he was profoundly indifferen to the enthusiasm of the two men in black.

"Yes, admirable! *prorsus admirabile!*" continue Aramis; "yet demanding a deep investigation of th writings of the fathers and of the holy books. But have owned to these learned ecclesiastics, and that i great humility, that the watchings of the guards an the service of the king have made me, to some exten negligent of study. I should therefore feel more a home, *facilius natans*, in some subject of my own sele tion, which would be, in relation to these difficult que tions, what morals are to metaphysics in philosophy."

"Observe this fine exordium!" exclaimed the Jesuit

D'Artagnan was thoroughly tired; so also was th curate.

"Exordium," repeated the curate, for the sake saying something.

"'*Quemadmodum inter cælorum immensitatem.*'"

Aramis glanced at D'Artagnan and saw that his frien was gaping in a way to dislocate his jaws.

"Let us speak French, father," said he to the Jesui "M. d'Artagnan will more truly enjoy our discourse."

"Yes," said D'Artagnan, "I am fatigued by m journey and this Latin escapes me."

"Agreed," said the Jesuit, somewhat piqued, whil the delighted curate gave D'Artagnan a look of earne gratitude. "Well, see the conclusion which might b drawn from this exercitation."

"Moses, the servant of God—he is only the servan do you observe?—Moses blessed with the hands; he ha his two arms held forth whilst the Hebrews battled wi

their foes; therefore, he blessed with both hands. Besides what says the Gospel? '*Imponite manus*' and not '*manum*'—'lay on the hands' and not 'the hand.'"

"'Lay on the hands,'" repeated the curate, performing at the same time the gesture.

"To St. Peter, on the other hand, of whom the popes are the successors," continued the Jesuit, "'*porrige digitos*'—'stretch out the fingers;' do you perceive now?"

"Certainly," said Aramis, in great delight; "but the thing is subtle."

"The fingers," resumed the Jesuit, "St. Peter blessed with the fingers. The pope, then, blesses also with the fingers. And with how many fingers does he bless? With three fingers, one for the Father, one for the Son, and one for the Holy Ghost."

They all crossed themselves at these words and D'Artagnan thought it his duty to imitate the example.

"The pope is the successor of St. Peter, and he represents the three divine powers—the remainder, *ordines inferiores*, of the ecclesiastical hierarchy, by the name of saints, archangels and angels. The very humblest priests, such as our deacons and sacristans, bless with sprinklers, which simulate an indefinite number of blessing fingers. The subject is now simplified. *Argumentum omni denudatum ornamento.* I could expand it," continued the Jesuit, "into two volumes of the size of this."

And in his enthusiasm he thumped the folio of St. Chrysostom, which made the table bend beneath its weight.

D'Artagnan trembled.

"Certainly," said Aramis, "I render justice to the beauties of this thesis, but at the same time I feel that it would overwhelm me. I had chosen this text—tell me, dear D'Artagnan, if it is not to your taste—'*Non inutile est desiderium in oblatione;*' or, still better—'A small regret is not unbecoming in an offering to the Lord.'"

"Stop there!" vociferated the Jesuit, "for that thesis

borders on heresy. There is a proposition almost identical in the *Augustinus* of the heresiarch, Jansanius, for which, sooner or later, the book will be burned by the executioner's hands. Take care, my young friend, you incline toward false doctrines; you will go astray, my young friend."

"You will go astray," said the curate, shaking his head in profound concern.

"You are close upon the famous point of free-will which is a fatal stumbling-block; you nearly approach the insinuations of the Pelagians and the semi-Pelagians.'

"But, reverend sir——" resumed Aramis, somewhat stunned by the storm of arguments which descended on his head.

"How will you prove," continued the Jesuit, without allowing him to speak, "that we ought to regret the world when we offer ourselves to God? Listen to this dilemma: God is God, and the world is the devil hence, to regret the world is to regret the devil. There is my conclusion."

"It is mine also," said the curate.

"But pray——" resumed Aramis.

"*Desideras diabolum!* unhappy man!" exclaimed the Jesuit.

"He regrets the devil! Oh, my young friend," resumed the curate with a groan, "*do* not regret the devil I beseech you!"

D'Artagnan was beginning to lose his wits. He seemed to be in a company of madmen and to be in danger himself of becoming as mad as those he was listening to—only he was obliged to hold his tongue, from not understanding the language they so freely quoted.

"But listen to me," interrupted Aramis, with a degree of politeness under which some impatience began to be perceptible; "I do not say that I regret. No, I never will pronounce that phrase, which would be unorthodox."

The Jesuit raised his arms toward heaven and the curate did the same.

"No. but admit at least that it would be unbecoming

merely to offer to the Lord that with which we are *entirely* disgusted. Am I right, D'Artagnan ? "

" I think you're devilish well posted, Aramis ! " exclaimed the latter.

The curate and the Jesuit started from their seats.

" Now, here is what I lay down—it is a syllogism. The world is not wanting in attractions. I quit the world, therefore I make a sacrifice. Now, Scripture says, positively, ' Make a sacrifice unto the Lord.' "

" That is true," exclaimed the antagonists.

" Then," continued Aramis, pinching his ear to make it red, as he had before waved his hands to make them white, " then I have made a stanza upon this subject, which I showed last year to M. Voiture, and on which the great man highly complimented me."

" A stanza ! " exclaimed the Jesuit, scornfully.

" A stanza ! " responded the curate, mechanically.

" Recite it, recite it," vociferated D'Artagnan ; " it will be a little change."

" No, for it is religious," replied Aramis ; " it is theology in verse."

" The deuce it is ! " exclaimed D'Artagnan.

" Here it is," said Aramis, with a gentle air of modesty, which was not altogether exempt from hypocrisy :

" ' All you who mourn past happiness flown,
And live through dark and weary days of woe,
Your sorrows all one certain end shall know,
When tears are offered up to God alone ;
O ye who mourn below ! ' "

D'Artagnan and the curate seemed pleased. The Jesuit persisted in his opinion.

" Be cautious of a profane taste in theological style. What, in fact, does St. Augustine say ? ' *Severus sit clericorum sermo.* ' "

" Yes, let the sermon be clear," said the curate.

" But," hastily interrupted the Jesuit, on seeing his attendant blundering ; " but your thesis will please the ladies and that is all ; it will have the popularity of one of M. Patru's pleadings."

"God grant it!" exclaimed Aramis, overjoyed.

"You say," resumed the Jesuit, "the world still speaks within you in a loud voice—*altissima voce.* You hanker after the world, my young friend, and I fear that grace will not prove efficacious."

"Doubt me not, reverend father; I answer for myself."

"Worldly presumption!"

"I know my own heart, father; my resolution is irrevocable."

"Then you persist in pursuing this thesis?"

"I feel myself called to treat that and not any other. I shall therefore continue it, and I trust that to-morrow you will be contented with the corrections which I shall have made in it, under your advice."

"Work slowly," said the curate; "we leave you in an excellent disposition."

"Yes, the ground is all sown," said the Jesuit, "and we have no reason to fear that some part of the seed has fallen in stony places and some upon the highway, and that the birds of the air have eaten up the remainder; '*aves cæli comederunt illam.*'"

"May the plague choke you with your Latin!" exclaimed D'Artagnan, whose patience would hold out no longer.

"Farewell, my son," said the curate, "farewell till to-morrow."

"Adieu till to-morrow, rash youth," said the Jesuit. "You promise to be one of the lights of the church. God grant that this light may not prove a devouring flame!"

D'Artagnan, who had been gnawing his nails with impatience for an hour, was beginning to bite the flesh.

The two men in black bowed to Aramis and D'Artagnan and proceeded toward the door. Bazin, who had remained standing and had listened to this controversy with a pious jubilation, rushed toward them, seized the breviary of the curate and the missal of the

priest and walked respectfully before them to clear their path.

Aramis himself conducted them to the bottom of the stairs and came up again to D'Artagnan, who was still deep in thought.

When they were left alone the two friends at first maintained an embarrassed silence. Nevertheless, as it was imperative that one of them should speak first, and as D'Artagnan seemed determined to leave that honor to his friend,—

"You see me," said Aramis, "returned to my original ideas."

"Yes, as the gentleman said just now—efficacious grace has touched you."

"Oh, these plans of retirement have long been formed, and you, my friend, have often heard me speak of them, have you not?"

"Yes, certainly; but I confess that I always thought you were joking."

"What! about such things as these! Oh, D'Artagnan!"

"Why, we joke even in the face of death."

"And we are wrong to do so," said Aramis, "for death is the gate which leads to salvation or condemnation."

"Agreed," said D'Artagnan. "But do not let *us* discuss theology; you must have had enough for the day, and as for me, I confess I have almost forgotten what little Latin I ever knew; and besides, to tell the truth, I have eaten nothing since ten o'clock this morning and am as hungry as twenty devils."

"We will dine presently, my dear friend, only you will remember that this is Wednesday, and on that day I can neither eat meat, nor see any eaten. If you will be contented with my dinner, it is composed of boiled tetragones and fruit."

"What do you mean by tetragones?" anxiously inquired D'Artagnan.

"I mean spinach," replied Aramis; "but for you I

will add some eggs, although it is a grave infraction of rule, eggs being certainly meat, since the egg is the original of the chicken."

"Such a feast is not very fattening; but never mind. to remain with you I will submit to it."

"I am grateful to you for the sacrifice," replied Aramis; "but if it be not very nutritious to your body, depend upon it, it will benefit your soul."

"So, Aramis, you have really decided to enter the church? What will your friends say? What will M. de Treville say? They will look upon you as a deserter, I forewarn you."

"I do not enter the church—I return to it. It was the church that I deserted for the world, for you are aware that I did violence to my inclinations in taking the uniform of a musketeer."

"I know nothing about it."

"Are you ignorant, then, of my reasons for quitting the college?"

"Entirely so."

"Then listen to my history. Besides, the Scriptures say, 'confess yourselves to one another,' and I will now confess to you, D'Artagnan."

"And I give you absolution beforehand; you know that I am a tender-hearted fellow."

"Do not jest with sacred things, my friend."

"Go on, then, I am listening."

"I had been at the seminary from the age of nine years until I was one-and-twenty; in three days more I was to be an abbé and all would have been over. One evening when I went, according to my custom, to a house which I had frequented with pleasure—what can be expected from the young but weakness?—an officer, who was jealous because I often read the 'Lives of the Saints' to the mistress of the house, suddenly came in unannounced. On that very evening I had been translating an epistle of Judith into verse and was communicating it to the lady, who was paying me all sorts of compliments and was leaning on my shoulder to read

the verses over with me. The attitude, which was, I confess, somewhat unconstrained, offended the officer; he said nothing at the time, but when I went out he followed me and overtook me. 'M. l'abbé,' said he, 'would you like to be caned?' 'I cannot tell, sir,' said I; 'no one has ever dared to cane me.' 'Well, then, hear me, M. l'abbé: if you enter that house again where I met you this evening, I will dare to do it.'

"I believe I must have been afraid; I became very pale; I perceived that my legs failed me; I sought for some answer, but found none, so I kept silent. The officer waited for my answer: but finding that it did not come, he began to laugh, turned upon his heel and re-entered the house.

"I returned to the seminary. I am a gentleman born and have a high spirit, as you have remarked, my dear D'Artagnan. The insult was terrible, and entirely unknown as it was to the rest of the world, I felt it breathing and biting at my very heart's core. I declared to my superior that I did not think myself sufficiently prepared for ordination, and at my request the ceremony was put off for a year. I sought the best fencing-master in Paris; I engaged to take one lesson of him every day, and every day, throughout a whole year, I took that lesson. Then, on the very anniversary of the day on which I had been insulted, I hung my cassock on a peg, I took the complete costume of a cavalier, and went to a ball given by a lady of my acquaintance, where I knew that I should find my man. It was in the Rue des Francs-Bourgeois, very near La Force.

"My officer was, in fact, there. I went up to him as he was singing a love ditty and looking tenderly at a lady, and I interrupted him in the very middle of the second verse. 'Sir,' said I, 'are you still unwilling that I should enter a certain house in the Rue Payenne and will you still give me a caning if I should take it into my head to disobey you?'

"The officer looked at me with astonishment and then said, 'What do you want, sir? I do not know you.' 'I am,' said I, 'the little abbé who was reading the "Lives of the Saints," and who translated Judith into verses.' 'Ah, ah, I remember,' said the officer, merrily; 'and what do you want?' 'I would wish you to find leisure to take a walk with me.' 'To-morrow, with great pleasure, if you really wish it.' 'No, not to-morrow, if you please, but immediately.' 'If you positively require it.' 'Yes, I do require it.' 'Come then, let us go,' said he. 'Ladies, do not disturb yourselves; only give me time to kill this gentleman and I will return and finish the second verse.'

"We went out. I led him to the Rue Payenne, to the exact spot where, a year before, and exactly at the same hour, he had complimented me as I have related to you. The moonlight was superb. We drew our swords, and at the first pass I killed him."

"The devil!" exclaimed D'Artagnan.

"Now, as the ladies did not perceive their singer return, and as he was found in the Rue Payenne with a frightful sword-wound right through his body, it was thought that it was I who had thus accommodated him and the affair caused some scandal. I was, therefore, obliged for a time to give up the cassock. Athos, with whom I made acquaintance about this period, and Porthos, who had taught me, in addition to my fencing lessons, some merry thrusts, determined me on demanding the uniform of a musketeer. The king had loved my father, who was killed at the siege of Arras, and this uniform was granted to me. Thus you will understand that the day is now at hand for my return into the bosom of the church."

"And why to-day, more than yesterday or to-morrow? What has happened to you now to give you such miserable ideas?"

"This wound, my dear D'Artagnan, has been to me a warning from Heaven."

"This wound—bah! it is almost healed. I am quite

certain it is not that which causes the worst of your suffering."

"And what is it?" said Aramis, coloring.

"You have a deeper one in your heart, Aramis—one that bleeds internally — a wound made by a woman."

The eye of Aramis sparkled in spite of himself.

"Ah," said he, concealing his emotion under a feigned negligence; "do not speak of such things. Such thoughts are not for me, nor such solicitudes of love. *Vanitas vanitatum!* What! do you suppose, then, that my brain is turned? And for whom? Some pretty wench, some canon's daughter, to whom I might have paid my court in garrison? For shame!"

"Forgive me, my dear Aramis, but I thought that you aimed a little higher."

"Higher? And what am I, that should have so much ambition? A poor musketeer, unprovided for and unknown, who hates servitude and feels himself an intruder in the turmoil of the world."

"Aramis! Aramis!" exclaimed D'Artagnan, looking on his friend with a glance of doubt.

"Dust," continued Aramis, "I return to dust. Life is full of sorrow and humiliation," continued he, in deep affliction; "all the threads which bind happiness break in our hands by turns; fragile, above all, are the threads of gold. Oh! my dear D'Artagnan," added Aramis, infusing into his tone a slight degree of bitterness, "believe me, man should jealously conceal whatever wounds he may have. Silence is the last enjoyment of the unfortunate; let none know your grief; the curious would call up our tears, as insects suck the life-blood of a wounded deer."

"Alas! my dear Aramis!" said D'Artagnan, sighing deeply in his turn, "it is my own history which you are unfolding."

"What?"

"Yes, a woman whom I loved, whom I adored, has just been carried away by force. I know not where she

is. where she has been taken to ; perhaps she is in prison, perhaps dead ! "

" But you have at least the consolation of knowing that she did not quit you voluntarily and that if you do not hear from her it is because communication is prevented ; whilst——"

" Whilst what ? "

" Nothing," said Aramis, " nothing."

" Then you renounce the world forever ? It is a settled choice, your irrevocable determination ? "

" Yes, forever ! You are my friend to-day ; to-morrow you will be only as a shadow, or rather you will no longer exist to me. As for the world, it is at best no better than a graveyard."

" The plague ! This is all very lamentable."

" What would you desire ? My vocation calls me—it impels me onward '

D'Artagnan smiled, but made no reply Aramis continued :

" Nevertheless, whilst I am still belonging to the world, I would talk with you about yourself and our friends."

" And I," said D'Artagnan, " would gladly have conferred with you about yourself did I not see you so dissevered from all earthly things : at love you cry shame ; friends are shadows ; and the world itself is but a sepulchre."

" Alas ! you will, at last, yourself find it so ! " exclaimed Aramis, with a sigh.

" Let us waste no more words about it," said D'Artagnan, " and let us burn this letter, which possibly announces to you some new infidelity of some pretty waiting-maid."

" What letter ? " eagerly cried Aramis.

" A letter which came to your lodgings during your absence and which I have taken charge of."

" But from whom comes this letter ? "

" Perhaps from some disconsolate wench, some waiting-maid of Madame de Chevreuse, perhaps, who wa

obliged to return to Tours with her mistress, and who, to make her *billet-doux* look gaudy, has provided perfumed paper and sealed the letter with a duchess's coronet!"

"What are you telling me?"

"I surely cannot have lost it," gravely remarked the young man, pretending to search for it. "But happily the world is a sepulchre—the men and consequently the women are shadows, and love is a sentiment at which you cry shame!"

"Ah! D'Artagnan! D'Artagnan! you will kill me!" ejaculated Aramis.

"At last, here it is," said D'Artagnan, drawing the letter from his pocket.

Aramis made a bound, seized the letter, and read, or rather devoured it, whilst his countenance gleamed with joy.

"The waiting-woman seems to write in a good style," said the messenger, carelessly.

"Thanks, D'Artagnan!" exclaimed the almost delirious Aramis. "She could not help it; she was compelled to return to Tours; she has not been unfaithful to me; she loves me still. Come, my friend, let me embrace you! my happiness suffocates me."

And the two friends began dancing around the folios of the venerable St. Chrysostom, treading gallantly on the leaves of the thesis, which had fallen to the ground.

At this moment Bazin entered with the spinach and omelette.

"Fly, wretch!" cried Aramis, throwing his skull-cap at his head "Return whence you came; take away these horrible vegetables and those frightful eggs! Ask for a larded hare, a fat capon, a leg of mutton and garlic, and four bottles of the best old Burgundy!"

Bazin looked at his master, and could make nothing of this change—let the omelette fall, in despair, upon the spinach and the spinach on the carpet.

"Now is the time," said D'Artagnan, "to consecrate

your existence to the King of kings, if you desire to do Him homage; *non inutile desiderium in oblatione.*"

"Go to the devil with your Latin, my dear D'Artagnan. Let us drink! Egad! let us drink, and tell me what has been going on in the world."

CHAPTER XXVII.

ATHOS'S WIFE.

"Now we must obtain some intelligence of Athos," said D'Artagnan to the joyous Aramis, after having told him everything that had happened since their departure from Paris, and after an excellent dinner had made the one forget his thesis and the other his fatigue.

"Do you believe, then, that any misfortune has befallen him?" demanded Aramis. "Athos is so cool, so brave, and wields his sword so skillfully."

"Yes, doubtless, and no one knows better than I do the courage and address of Athos. But I prefer the shock of lances on my sword to the blows of sticks, and I fear that Athos may have been beaten by the rabble, who hit hard and do not soon leave off. It is, I confess, on this account that I should like to set out as soon as possible."

"I will endeavor to accompany you," said Aramis, "although I am scarcely in a fit state to mount a horse. Yesterday I tried the discipline which you see on the wall; but the pain made me give up that pious exercise."

"My dear friend, none ever heard of endeavoring to cure the wounds of a carbine by the stroke of a cat-o'-nine-tails. But you were ill, and as illness makes the head weak, I excuse you."

"And when shall you set out?"

"To-morrow, at break of day. Rest as well as you

can to-night, and to-morrow, if you are able, we will go together."

"Farewell, then, till to-morrow," said Aramis, "for, iron as you are, you must surely want some rest."

The next morning, when D'Artagnan entered Aramis's room, he found him looking out of the window.

"What are you looking at?" said he.

"Faith, I am admiring those three magnificent horses which the stable boys are holding. It is a princely pleasure to travel on such animals."

"Well, then, my dear Aramis, you will give yourself that pleasure, for one of those horses belongs to you."

"Ah, bah! and which?"

"Whichever you like, for I have no preference."

"And the rich caparison which covers him, is that also mine?"

"Certainly."

"You are laughing at me, D'Artagnan."

"I have left off laughing since you began to speak French again."

"And are those gilded holsters, that velvet housing, and that saddle, studded with silver, mine?"

"Yours! Just as that horse which steps so proudly is mine, and that other one, which caracoles so bravely, is for Athos."

"I' faith, they are superb animals."

"I am glad they please your taste."

"Is it the king, then, who has made you this present?"

"You may be quite sure that it was not the cardinal; but do not disturb yourself as to whence they came, only be satisfied that one of them is your own."

"I choose the one that the red-haired valet is holding."

"Admirable."

"Thank God!" cried Aramis, "this drives away the last remnant of my pain. I could mount such a horse with thirty bullets in my body. Ah! upon my soul, what superb stirrups! Halloo! Bazin, come here this instant!"

Bazin appeared, silent and melancholy, at the door.

"Polish up my sword, smarten my hat, brush my cloak and load my pistols," said Aramis.

"The last order is unnecessary," said D'Artagnan, "for there are loaded pistols in your holsters."

Bazin sighed deeply.

"Come, Master Bazin, make yourself happy," said D'Artagnan; "the kingdom of Heaven may be gained in any condition of life."

"But he was already such a good theologian," said Bazin, almost in tears; "he would have become a bishop—perhaps even a cardinal."

"Well, my poor Bazin, let us see and reflect a little. What is the use of being a churchman, pray? You do not by that means avoid going to war, for you see that the cardinal is about to make his first campaign with a headpiece and a halbert in his hand; and M. de Nogaret de la Valette, what do you say of *him?* He is a cardinal, too, and ask his lackey how often he has made lint for him."

"Alas!" sighed Bazin, "I know it, sir. The whole world is turning topsy-turvy nowadays."

During this time the two young men and the poor lackey had gone downstairs.

"Hold my stirrup for me, Bazin," said Aramis.

Aramis sprang into his saddle with his accustomed grace and activity, but after some curvets and capers of the noble animal the rider felt his pains so utterly insupportable that he grew pale and wavered in his seat. D'Artagnan, who, foreseeing an accident, had kept his eye upon him, rushed toward him, caught him in his arms, and led him back again to his room.

"Never mind, my dear Aramis," said he; "take care of yourself. I will go alone in search of Athos."

"You are a man of steel," said Aramis.

"No," replied he, "I am fortunate, that is all. But what will you do whilst I am absent? No more theses, no more arguments on hands, no more benedictions, eh?"

Aramis smiled.

"No, I shall make verses," said he.

"Yes; verses perfumed with odor from the note of Madame de Chevreuse's waiting-woman. Teach Bazin prosody—that will fill him with delight; and as for the horse, ride him for a little while every day, and that will make you accustomed to the work."

"Oh, as for that, be satisfied that you shall find me ready to follow you."

They bade each other adieu, and in a few minutes D'Artagnan, having commended his friend to the care of Bazin and the landlady, was trotting onward on the road toward Amiens.

And in what condition should he find Athos, if, even, he should find him at all?

The position in which he left him was critical and it was not improbable that Athos might have been killed.

This idea clouded the brow of D'Artagnan and made him mutter many a vow of vengeance.

Of all his friends Athos was the oldest and apparently the least akin to him in sympathies and tastes. And yet he had a marked preference for this gentleman. The noble and distinguished air of Athos—those flashes of dignity which, from time to time, shone forth from the cloud in which he had voluntarily enveloped himself—that unalterable equanimity of temper which made him the best companion in the world—that forced, yet cutting gayety—that courage, which would have been denominated blind had it not been the result of the rarest coolness—so many excellent qualities attracted more than the esteem, more, even, than the friendship of D'Artagnan! they attracted his admiration.

In fact, by the side even of the elegant and noble courtier, M. de Treville, Athos, in his bright days, might advantageously challenge comparison. He was of the middle height, but his figure was so admirably formed and proportioned, that, more than once, in his sportive contests with Porthos, he had subdued the giant, whose

physical power had become proverbial amongst the musketeers. His countenance, with its piercing eyes, and aquiline nose, and a chin chiseled like that of Brutus, had an indescribable character of dignity and grace. His hands, of which he took no care, were the despair of Aramis, who cherished his at a great expense of almond paste and perfumed oil. The sound of his voice was at the same time penetrating and melodious. And then —a something altogether indefinable in Athos, who shrunk from all display—there was a delicate knowledge of the world and of the customs of the most brilliant society, that was perceptible, apparently without his being conscious of it, in his minutest action.

If an entertainment was to be prepared, Athos could arrange it better than anybody else, placing every guest in the precise rank and station to which his ancestry or his own achievements had entitled him. If heraldic science was required, Athos knew all the noble families in the kingdom, their genealogies, their alliances, their arms and the origin of their arms. Etiquette had no minutiæ with which he was not well acquainted. He knew the rights of the great landowners, and so thoroughly understood hunting and falconry that one day, in talking of that art, he had astonished the king himself, who was a past master. Like all the noblemen of the time, he rode and fenced to perfection. And more than that, his education had been so well attended to, even on scholastic points, which were rarely introduced amongst gentlemen of that age, that he smiled at the scraps of Latin which Aramis let fall and which Porthos pretended to understand; and two or three times, even, to the great astonishment of his friends, when Aramis had made some mistake in the rudiments, Athos had put a verb into its proper tense or a noun into its case. Besides all this, his probity was unimpeachable, at a time when military men made so light of their religion and conscience, lovers, of the rigorous delicacy of our own days, and the poor, of the seventh commandment.

Athos was, therefore, a very extraordinary man. And

yet this nature so distinguished, this creature so beautiful, this essence so fine, was seen to turn insensibly toward a material life, as old men often tend to physical and moral imbecility. In his hours of privation, and these were frequent, Athos was extinguished—his luminous nature and all his brilliant qualities disappeared as in a dark night. Then in place of the vanished demi-god there remained scarcely a human being; his head drooped, his eye was dull, his voice heavy and languid, and he would look for hours at nothing but his bottle and his glass, or at Grimaud, who, accustomed to obey him by signs, read in his looks his lightest wish which he immediately gratified. If the four friends met by chance during one of these intervals, a word, escaping as if by a violent effort, was all that Athos could contribute to the conversation; but to compensate for this deficiency, Athos alone drank as much as all the rest, without any other apparent effect than a more manifest contraction of the eyebrows and a more profound melancholy.

D'Artagnan, with whose inquisitive and penetrating mind we are already acquainted, whatever might have been his desire to satisfy his curiosity on the subject, had been unable, hitherto, to assign any cause for this melancholy, or for its frequent recurrence. Athos never received any letters nor ever did anything which was not known to his three friends. It could not be said that his sadness was a result of wine, for, on the contrary, he only drank in the hope of conquering that which the remedy in effect increased. His despondency could not be attributed to play, for, unlike Porthos, who indicated by songs and oaths all the fluctuations of fortunes, Athos maintained the same impassibility whether he had won or lost. In the circle of the musketeers he had been seen to win three thousand pistoles in an evening and to lose them again, as well as his horse, his arms, or even his gold-embroidered gala-belt, and to win back the whole of these and a hundred louis over without his handsome black eye-

brow having been depressed or raised by a hair's-breadth, without his hand having lost its pearly hue, and without his conversation, which was on that evening cheerful, having ceased for one instant to be agreeable and calm.

Nor was it, as in the case of our neighbors the English, an atmospheric influence which clouded his countenance, for this sadness became more intense in the most brilliant seasons of the year; June and July were the months of terror for Athos.

It was not about the present that he grieved, and he shrugged his shoulders when any one spoke to him of the future. His secret sorrow, then, had reference to the past, as had been vaguely told to D'Artagnan.

The mysterious complexion which was thus spread over him only rendered more interesting the man who, neither by his eyes nor tongue, had ever, even when mellowest with wine, revealed anything to the most skillfully conducted scrutiny.

"Well," mused D'Artagnan, "poor Athos may perhaps be now dead, and dead through my fault, for it was I who drew him into this affair, of which he knew neither the origin nor aim, and from which he could expect no benefit."

"Without reckoning, sir," said Planchet, "that we probably owe our lives to him. You remember how he cried out: 'Away, D'Artagnan! I am seized!' and, after having discharged his two pistols, what a terrible noise he made with his sword! One would have believed he was twenty men, or rather, twenty mad devils!"

These words redoubled D'Artagnan's eagerness. He urged forward his horse, which, needing no urging, carried him on at a gallop.

Toward eleven o'clock in the morning they caught sight of Amiens, and at half-past eleven they were at the door of the unlucky inn.

D'Artagnan had often meditated against the treacherous host one of those signal acts of vengeance which

give no satisfaction except in the anticipation. He entered the hotel with his hat over his eyes, his left hand on the hilt of his sword, making his riding whip whistle with his right.

"Do you know me?" said he to the landlord, who came forward to receive him.

"I have not that honor, sir," replied the latter, his eyes dazzled by the splendid equipage with which D'Artagnan presented himself.

"Ah! you do not know me again?"

"No, sir."

"Well, then, two words will restore your recollection. What have you done with that gentleman against whom you had the audacity, about a fortnight ago, to bring an accusation of passing bad money?"

The host turned pale, for D'Artagnan had assumed a very threatening attitude, and Planchet closely followed his master's example.

"Ah, sir, do not mention that," replied the host in a most lamentable tone of voice; "ah, sir, how dearly have I paid for that fault! Alas! unfortunate has been my fate!"

"This gentleman, I say—what has become of him?"

"Only deign to hear me, sir, and be merciful. Be seated, I beseech you."

D'Artagnan, dumb from anger and anxiety, sat down, stern as a judge, and Planchet finally established himself behind his chair.

"This is the statement, sir," said the trembling landlord, "for now I recognize you. It was you who went away when I had that unhappy dispute with the gentleman you speak of."

"Yes, it was I, so you see that you have no mercy to expect if you do not tell the whole truth."

"Condescend to listen, sir, and you shall hear all."

"I hear you."

"I had been informed by the authorities that a celebrated coiner would arrive at my hotel with several of his companions, all disguised under the uniform of

guards or musketeers. Your horses, your servants, your features, gentlemen, were all exactly described."

"What next? what next?" cried D'Artagnan, who soon discerned the source of this precise description.

"Therefore, under the direction of the authorities who sent me a reinforcement of six men, I took such measures as I considered indispensable to apprehend these pretended coiners."

"Well!" said D'Artagnan, whose ears were terribly wounded by this term *coiners*.

"Forgive me, sir, for mentioning such things, but they are truly my excuse. The authorities had frightened me, and you know that an innkeeper must respect the authorities."

"But once more, where is this gentleman? What has become of him? Is he dead, or is he alive?"

"Patience, sir, we have just come to that. Well, you know what happened; and your hasty departure," added the innkeeper, with a cunning which did not escape D'Artagnan, "seemed to justify my proceedings. The gentleman, your friend, defended himself desperately. His servant had, unfortunately, sought an unforeseen quarrel with the officers of justice, who were disguised as stable-boys."

"Ah! the hounds!" cried D'Artagnan. "You were all in the plot, and I know not why I should not exterminate you all!"

"Alas! no, sir; we were not all agreed, as you will soon perceive. The gentleman, your friend—pardon me for not giving him the honorable name which no doubt he bears, but we do not know that name—the gentleman, your friend, having disabled two men by his two pistol-shots, beat a retreat, defending himself with his sword, with which he also maimed another of my men and with the flat side of which he stunned me."

"But, hangman! will you come to an end? Athos! what has become of Athos?"

"In beating his retreat, as I have told you, sir, he found behind him the cellar stairs, and as the door was

open, he rushed into it. Once there he locked the door and barricaded himself within; and as we were sure of finding him there, we let him alone."

"Aha!" said D'Artagnan, "it was not thought necessary to kill him, but only to imprison him."

"Good Lord! to imprison *him*, sir! He imprisoned himself, I swear! For first he had made a pretty severe business of it—one man was killed outright, and two grievously wounded. The dead man and the two wounded ones were carried off by their companions and I have never since heard any more of either the one or the other. I, myself, when I had recovered my senses, went to find the governor, to whom I related everything that had taken place and of whom I inquired what I was to do with the prisoner. But the governor seemed as if he was entirely ignorant of the matter; he told me that he did not know what I was talking about; that the orders I had received did not come from him, and that if I had the misfortune to tell any one whatever that he had anything to do with this disturbance, he would have me hung. It appeared that I had made a mistake, sir; that I had arrested the wrong person, and that he who should have been arrested had escaped."

"But Athos!" cried D'Artagnan, who became doubly bold when he found that the authorities disclaimed the affair; "what has become of him?"

"As I was in haste to repair the injury I had inflicted on the prisoner," replied the innkeeper, "I hurried to the cellar to liberate him. Ah! sir, he was no longer a man—he was a devil! On my proposing his liberation he declared that it was a snare which was laid for him and that before he came out he must impose conditions. I told him with great humility—for I did not conceal from myself the awkward position in which I had placed myself by laying hands on one of his majesty's musketeers—I told him that I was ready to submit to his conditions.

"'First,' said he, 'you must give me back my servant, completely armed.'

"We hastened to obey this order; for you understand, sir, that we were disposed to do everything your friend wished. M. Grimaud—for he told us his name, although he speaks but little—M. Grimaud was sent down into the cellar, all wounded as he was, and his master, having received him, barricaded the door again and bade us mind our business."

"But, after all," cried D'Artagnan, "where is he? Where is Athos?"

"In the cellar, sir."

"What, you rascal! have you kept him in the cellar all this time?"

"Good heavens! no, sir. We keep him in the cellar! You do not know, then, what he is about there? Ah! if you could only persuade him to come out, sir, I should be forever grateful to you! I would adore you as my patron saint!"

"Then he is there? I shall find him there?"

"Certainly, sir; he has obstinately persisted in remaining there. Every day we put through the air-hole some bread on the point of a pitchfork, and some meat, too, when he asks for it; but alas! it is not of bread and meat that he makes the greatest consumption. I endeavored once to go down, with two of my servants, but he went into a terrible fury. I heard the click of his pistols and his servant's carbine. Then, when we asked what their intentions were, the master answered that they had between them forty shots to fire and that they would fire them all, even to the very last, sooner than permit any one of us to put a foot in the cellar. Then, sir, I went and complained to the governor, who told me that I had only got what I deserved and that this would teach me how to insult honorable gentlemen who put up at my house."

"So that since that time——" replied D'Artagnan, who was unable to refrain from laughing at the pitiful visage of the innkeeper.

"So that, from that time, sir," continued he, "we led the saddest life that can be imagined; for, sir, you

must know that all our provisions are in the cellar. There is our wine in bottles and our wine in casks ; beer, oil, spices, lard and sausages ; and as we are forbidden to go down, we are obliged to refuse provision and drink to the travelers who come here, so that we lose custom every day. Should your friend stop in my cellar one more week, we shall be utterly ruined."

" And serve you right, too, you knave ! Could you not plainly see by our appearance that we were men of quality and not coiners ? "

" Yes, sir, yes ; you are right," said mine host. " But hark ! hark ! he is getting into a passion now."

" No doubt somebody has disturbed him," said D'Artagnan.

" But he needs must be disturbed," exclaimed the host. " Two English gentlemen have just come in."

" Well, what then ? "

" Well, the English gentlemen love good wine, as you know, sir, and these gentlemen have called for the very best. My wife has, no doubt, asked permission of M. Athos to enter to satisfy these gentlemen, and he has refused, as usual. Ah, merciful goodness ! listen how the uproar increases."

D'Artagnan did, in fact, hear a great noise proceeding from the cellar. He therefore arose and, preceded by the landlord, who wrung his hands, and followed by Planchet, who carried his carbine ready cocked, he approached the scene of action. The two gentlemen were highly exasperated ; they had traveled a long way and were dying with hunger and thirst.

" But it is absolute tyranny," cried they, in very good French, although in a foreign accent, " that this raving lunatic will not allow these good people the use of their own wine. We will break open the door and if he is too furious we will kill him."

" Hold there, gentlemen ! " exclaimed D'Artagnan, drawing his pistols from his belt ; " you will not kill any one, if you please."

" Very good, very good," said the calm voice of Athos

from behind the door; "let these devourers of little children enter, and we shall soon see."

Brave as they appeared to be, the two Englishmen looked at one another with some degree of hesitation. One would have said that the cellar contained one of those ravenous ogres, those gigantic heroes of the popular legends, whose cavern none might enter with impunity.

There was a moment of silence, but at last the two Englishmen were ashamed to retire, and the more impatient of them went down five or six steps of the staircase and gave the door a kick, sufficient to break through a wall.

"Planchet," said D'Artagnan, cocking his pistols, "I will take the one that is up here, you take charge of him who is below. Ah! gentlemen, you wish for a fight, do you? Well, we will give you one!"

"My God!" cried the hollow voice of Athos. "I think I hear D'Artagnan's voice."

"Yes," said D'Artagnan, raising his voice in his turn, "it is I, myself, my friend."

"Good!" said Athos, "then we'll work these panel breakers!"

The gentlemen had drawn their swords, but finding themselves caught between two fires, they hesitated for a moment. As before, however, pride carried the day, and a second kick made the door crash from top to bottom.

"Step aside, D'Artagnan, step aside," cried Athos, "I am going to fire."

"Gentlemen," cried D'Artagnan, whose coolness never forsook him, "gentlemen, think better of it. Wait a moment, Athos. You are about to begin a bad business, gentlemen, and will be riddled with shot. Here am I and my servant, who will oblige you with three volleys; you will receive the same number from the cellar; and then we shall still have our swords, which I and my friend can handle pretty well, I assure you. Let me arrange the affair. You shall have something to drink, directly, I give you my word."

"If there is any left," growled Athos, in a sneering tone

The innkeeper felt a cold perspiration trickling down his back.

"What! if there is any left?" muttered he.

"What the deuce!" replied D'Artagnan, "there must be some left; surely these two cannot yet have drunk up the cellar. Gentlemen, return your swords to their scabbards."

"Well! put your pistols back into your belts!"

"Willingly."

D'Artagnan set the example. Then, turning to Planchet, he made him a sign to uncock his carbine.

The Englishmen were satisfied, but grumbled as they sheathed their swords. D'Artagnan gave them an account of Athos's imprisonment, and as they were men of honor, they blamed the innkeeper.

"Now, gentlemen," continued he, "return to your room, and I answer for it that in ten minutes you shall have everything you want."

The Englishmen bowed and departed.

"Now that I am alone, my dear Athos," said D'Artagnan, "open the door to me, I beseech you."

"Directly," said Athos.

Then was heard the sound of clashing fagots and groaning beams; these were the counterscarps and bastions of Athos, which the besieged was himself demolishing.

In another instant the door moved and there was seen the pale face of Athos, who with a rapid glance surveyed the outworks.

D'Artagnan threw himself upon his neck and embraced him tenderly. But when he wished to lead him out of this humid habitation, he perceived that Athos staggered.

"You are wounded!" exclaimed he.

"Me? Not the least in the world. I am dead drunk, that's all, and never did man more to become so. By Jove! landlord, I must have drunk for my own share at least one hundred and fifty bottles."

"Gracious heavens!" exclaimed the landlord, "if the servant has drunk only half as much as the master, I am a ruined man!"

"Grimaud is too well behaved a servant," said Athos, "to allow himself to live in the same manner as his master; he has therefore only drunk out of the cask. Hark! I verily believe that he has forgotten to put the spigot in. Do you hear? It is running."

D'Artagnan broke out into a roar of laughter, which changed the landlord's shivers into a blazing fever.

At the same time Grimaud made his appearance behind his master, with his carbine on his shoulder and his head shaking, like the drunken Satyr in Rubens's pictures. He was soaked, both before and behind, with an unctuous liquid which the landlord recognized as his best olive oil.

The little company crossed the large room and installed itself in the best apartment of the inn, which D'Artagnan took possession of authoritatively.

In the meantime the landlord and his wife hastened with lamps into the cellar from which they had been so long excluded and where a frightful spectacle awaited them.

Beyond the fortifications in which Athos had made a breach to get out and which were composed of fagots, planks and empty casks, arranged according to the rules of strategic art, they saw here and there, floating amidst the pools of oil and wine, the bones of all the hams that had been eaten; whilst a heap of broken bottles covered all the left-hand corner of the cellar, and a barrel, of which the tap had been left open, was losing through that exit its last drops of blood. The image of devastation and death, as the poet of antiquity says, reigned there as on a battle-field.

Of fifty sausages which had hung on the beams scarcely ten remained.

The lamentations of the landlord and his wife pierced through the vaulted ceiling of the cellar; D'Artagnan himself was affected by them, whilst Athos did not even turn his head.

But rage succeeded grief. The innkeeper armed himself with a spit and rushed, in a paroxysm of despair, into the room where the two friends were sitting.

"Some wine!" cried Athos, on seeing the landlord.

"Some wine!" exclaimed the astonished host. "Some wine! Why, you have drunk more than a hundred pistoles' worth; and I am a ruined man!—ruined! lost! annihilated!"

"Bah!" said Athos, "we are continuously thirsty."

"But even if you had been contented with drinking—but you have broken all the bottles."

"Why, you pushed me on a heap, which rolled over. It was all your fault."

"All my oil is lost!"

"Oil is a sovereign balm for wounds, and it was necessary that poor Grimaud should bathe those you had inflicted."

"All my sausages are gnawed."

"There is an enormous quantity of rats in that cellar."

"You shall pay dearly for all this!" cried the exasperated landlord.

"Thrice doomed knave!" exclaimed Athos, rising. But he fell back immediately; he had exhausted his strength. D'Artagnan hastened to shield him by raising his riding whip.

The host recoiled a step and burst into tears.

"Let this be a warning to you," said D'Artagnan, "to behave with a little more civility to the guests whom God sends you."

"God! say the devil."

"My dear friend," said D'Artagnan, "if you assail our ears in this way again, we will all four go and shut ourselves in your cellar and see whether the destruction is as great as you pretend."

"Well, then, gentlemen," said the landlord, "I am wrong, I confess, but mercy is due to every sinner; you are noblemen and I am only a poor innkeeper; you will have pity on me."

"Ah, if you talk in that manner," said Athos, "you

will pierce my heart and the tears will flow from my eyes as the wine ran from your casks. I am not so great a devil as I look. Come, come here, and let us talk it over."

The host approached with some uneasiness.

"Come here, I tell you, and do not be afraid," continued Athos. "At the moment I was about to pay you I laid my purse upon the table."

"Yes, my lord."

"And that purse contained sixty pistoles; where is it?"

"Lodged at the register-office, my lord. It was said to be false money."

"Well, then, get me back my purse again and keep the sixty pistoles."

"But your lordship well knows that the register-office never gives up what it has once laid hands on. If it was bad money there might be some hope, but unfortunately they are all good coin."

"Let us see," said D'Artagnan; "where is Athos's horse?"

"In the stable."

"How much is he worth?"

"Fifty pistoles at the most."

"He is worth eighty; take him and say no more about it."

"What! do you mean to sell my horse?" said Athos; "my Bajazet? And on what shall I make the campaign—on Grimaud's?"

"I bring you another," said D'Artagnan.

"And a magnificent one," cried the landlord.

"Then," said Athos, "if there be another, younger and handsomer, take the old one. And now let us have something to drink."

"Of what sort?" said mine host, completely pacified.

"Of that which lies at the bottom near the laths; there are twenty-five bottles of it remaining; the rest were broken by my fall. Bring up six."

"This man is a perfect tun!" said the landlord to

himself. "If he should only remain here a fortnight and should pay for what he drinks, I shall be able to re-establish my affairs."

"Now," said Athos, "whilst we are waiting for the wine, tell me what has become of the others. Come, let me hear."

D'Artagnan recounted how he had found Porthos in bed with a sprain and Aramis between two theologians. As he ended his narration the landlord entered with the bottles which had been ordered, and a ham which had been, fortunately, left outside the cellar.

"That's right," said Athos, filling his own glass and that of D'Artagnan; "here's to Porthos and Aramis. But, my friend, what is the matter with you and what has happened to you personally? I fancy that you are looking sad."

"Alas!" replied D'Artagnan, "I am the most unhappy of you all."

"You unhappy, D'Artagnan!" said Athos. "Let me hear how you can be unhappy. Tell me that."

"By and by," said D'Artagnan.

"By and by? And why by and by? Is it because you think that I am drunk, D'Artagnan? Just understand, then, that my ideas are never clearer than when I am in my cups. Speak, therefore; I am all attention."

D'Artagnan related his adventure with Madame Bonancieux. Athos heard him without even moving his eyebrows. Then, when he had ended:

"Those are all trifles," said Athos; "trifles."

This was the favorite word of Athos.

"You repeat the word *trifles*, my dear Athos," said D'Artagnan, "and it comes with a bad grace from you who have never loved."

The dull eye of Athos lighted up suddenly; yet it was with but a momentary flash and then it again became dull and wandering as before.

"It is true," he said, quietly, "I *have* never loved."

"You see, then, heart of stone," said D'Artagnan,

" that you are wrong to be so hard on us who have more susceptible natures."

" Susceptible natures ! wounded hearts ! " said Athos.

" What are you saying ? "

" I say that love is a lottery in which he who wins gains death ! You are very fortunate to have lost, believe me, my dear D'Artagnan, and if I have any advice to give you, it is to lose always."

" She seemed to love me so much ! "

" *Seemed*, indeed ! "

" Oh ! she loved me ! "

" Child ! There is not a man who has not, like you, believed that his mistress loved him, and there is not a man who has not been deceived."

" Except you, Athos, who never had one."

" It is true," said Athos, after a moment's silence, " I never had one. Let us drink."

" But then," said D'Artagnan, " philosopher as you are, instruct and console me ; I need instruction and consolation."

" Consolation—about what ? "

" About my misfortune."

" Your misfortune makes me smile," said Athos, shrugging his shoulders. " I should be curious to know what you would say if I were to tell you a tale of love."

" Which happened to yourself ? "

" Or to one of my friends—what does it signify ? "

" Tell it me, Athos, tell it."

" Let us drink, that will be better."

" Drink and tell your story."

" Yes, I can do that," said Athos, emptying and again filling his glass ; " the two things go admirably together."

" I am attentive," said D'Artagnan.

Athos collected himself, and as he did so D'Artagnan observed him grow paler. He was at that point of intoxication at which vulgar tipplers fall down and sleep. As for him, he actually dreamed aloud without sleeping. There was something awful in this somnambulism of intoxication.

" You absolutely wish for it ? "

" I entreat you," replied D'Artagnan.

" Well, then, it shall be as you desire. One of my friends—one of my friends, you understand, not myself," said Athos, interrupting himself, with a sombre smile ; " one of the counts of my province, that is to say, of Berri, as noble as a Dandolo or a Montmorency, became enamored at twenty-five years of age of a young girl of sixteen, who was as beautiful as Psyche. Through the simplicity of her age an ardent soul was perceptible—the soul less of a woman than of a poet. She did not please merely, she intoxicated the heart. Her home was in a small village, where she lived with her brother, who was a curate. They had both newly come into that part of the country. No one knew whence they came, and on seeing her so beautiful and her brother so pious, no one thought of inquiring. They were, moreover, said to belong to a good family. My friend, who was the great man of that neighborhood, might have beguiled her or even seized upon her by force, if he had chosen. He was the master, and who would have thought of defending two unknown strangers ? Unfortunately he was a man of honor and he married her. The fool ! the ass ! the idiot ! "

" But why so, since he loved her ? " said D'Artagnan.

" Wait a little," replied Athos. " He took her to his castle and made her the first lady of the province, and to do her justice, she maintained her station admirably."

" Well ? " said D'Artagnan.

" Well, one day when she was out hunting with her husband," continued Athos, in a low voice and speaking very quickly, " she fell from her horse and fainted. The count hastened to her assistance, and as she seemed half suffocated by her clothes, he cut them with his dagger and her shoulder was exposed. Guess what there was on her shoulder, D'Artagnan ! " said Athos with a convulsive burst of laughter.

" How can I tell ? " demanded D'Artagnan.

" A fleur-de-lis ! " said Athos. " She was branded ! "

And at one draught he emptied the glass which was in his hand.

"Horrible! What are you telling me?" cried D'Artagnan.

"The truth, my dear fellow. The angel was a fiend; the simple young girl had been a thief."

"And what did the count do?"

"The count was a powerful noble; he had the undisputed right of executing justice on his own lands; he tore off the remainder of her clothes, tied her hands behind her back and hung her to a tree!"

"Oh, heavens, Athos, a murder!" cried D'Artagnan.

"Yes, a murder—neither less nor more!" hissed Athos, pale as death. "But they leave us without wine, it seems."

And he seized the last bottle by its neck, put it to his mouth and emptied it at a draught, as though it had been an ordinary glass.

His head then fell on his two hands, whilst D'Artagnan remained before him, overwhelmed with horror.

"That has cured me of women—beautiful, poetic and captivating women," said Athos, raising himself and forgetting to continue the apologue of the count. "May God grant as much to you! Let us drink."

"And so she died?" stammered D'Artagnan.

"Egad!" said Athos, "hold your glass. Will you have some ham, you rogue? We cannot drink any more!"

"But her brother?" timidly added D'Artagnan.

"Her brother?" replied Athos.

"Yes, the priest."

"Ah! I sought him to hang him, also; but he was too quick for me—he had fled the evening before."

"And did any one ever discover who the wretch was?"

"It was the first lover and accomplice of the girl—a worthy fellow, who had pretended to be a curate that he might get his mistress married and provided for. I hope and trust he has been hanged and quartered long ago!"

"Oh, my God! my God!" exclaimed D'Artagnan, astounded by this horrible adventure.

"Eat some of this ham, D'Artagnan, it is excellent," said Athos, cutting a slice which he put on the young man's plate. "What a misfortune that there were not four such hams in the cellar. I should have drunk fifty bottles more."

D'Artagnan could no longer bear this conversation—it would have driven him mad. He let his head fall upon his hands and pretended to sleep.

"The young men nowadays do not know how to drink," said Athos, looking at him with pity; "yet D'Artagnan is one of the pluckiest of them all!"

CHAPTER XXVIII.

THE RETURN.

D'ARTAGNAN had not recovered from the consternation produced by the terrible communication of Athos. Many things yet appeared to him obscure in this half revealed confession. In the first place it had been made by a man who was quite drunk to another man who was half drunk; and yet, in spite of that confusion of the brain which is produced by two or three bottles of Burgundy, D'Artagnan, on waking the next morning, had each of Athos's words as thoroughly present to his mind as though they had been stamped upon it as they fell from his companion's lips. His doubts made him only the more eager to arrive at certainty, and he went to his friend's room with a determination to renew the conversation. But he found Athos quite himself again—that is to say, the acutest and most impenetrable of men.

Moreover, the musketeer, after he had exchanged a smile and shaken hands with him, anticipated his thought.

"I was very tipsy last night, my dear D'Artagnan," said he. "I perceived it this morning by my tongue,

which was still heavy, and my pulse, which was still agitated. I would bet that I uttered a thousand extravagances."

And as he said this he looked at his friend with an earnestness which embarrassed him.

"No," said D'Artagnan; "if I remember right, you said nothing more than common."

"Ah! you astonish me. I thought I had related some most lamentable story."

And he looked at the young man as if he would have read the very depths of his heart.

"Faith," replied D'Artagnan, "it appears that I was even more tipsy than you were, since I remember nothing."

Athos was not satisfied with this and continued:

"You cannot fail to have observed, my dear friend, that each one has his own kind of drunkenness—sad or gay. Mine is of a melancholy sort, and when once I am tipsy my mania is to narrate all the lugubrious tales with which my silly old nurse ever packed my brain. It is my weakness—a great fault, I confess; but, barring that, I am an excellent drinker."

Athos said this in such a natural manner that D'Artagnan was shaken in his conviction.

"Ah, then, that is it," said the young man, as if endeavoring to recall the truth; "that is what I remember as one recollects a dream, that we babbled of people being hanged."

"Ah! you see," said Athos, growing pale but attempting to smile, "I was sure of it. People being hanged are really my nightmare."

"Yes, yes," replied D'Artagnan; "and this is what I can recall to mind; yes, it was so; listen, then: it was something about a woman."

"See there," replied Athos, becoming almost livid "it is my best story, of the woman with fair hair; and when I tell that I am sure to be dead drunk."

"Yes, that was it," said D'Artagnan; "a story about a fair woman, tall and beautiful, with blue eyes."

" Yes, and hanged."

" By her husband, who was a nobleman of your acquaintance," said D'Artagnan, looking earnestly at Athos.

" Well, now, see how a man might be compromised when one no longer knows what he is saying," replied Athos, shrugging his shoulders as if he pitied himself. " Positively, I will not get tipsy any more, D'Artagnan ; it is a very bad habit."

D'Artagnan continued silent, and then suddenly changing the conversation, Athos said :

" Apropos, I thank you for the horse you have brought me."

" Do you like him ? "

" Yes, but he would not stand work."

" You are mistaken. I went ten leagues with him in less than an hour and a half, and he appeared as if he had only trotted the round of the Place St. Sulpice."

" Ah, then, you make me regret him."

" Regret him ? "

" Yes, for I have parted with him."

" How is that ? "

" The fact is, this morning I got up at six. You were sleeping like a deaf man, and I did not know what to do, being quite stupefied by last night's debauch. I therefore went down to the common room and saw one of the Englishmen, who was buying a horse of a dealer, his own having died the day before. I approached him, and as I saw he was offering a hundred pistoles for a sorrel horse,—' Egad, sir,' said I, ' I also have a horse to sell.' ' And a very handsome one, too,' said he ; ' I saw him yesterday ; your friend's servant was holding him.' ' Do you think he is worth a hundred pistoles ? ' ' Yes, will you sell him to me at that price ? ' ' No ; but I will play you for him.' ' At what ? ' ' Dice.'

" No sooner said than done, and I lost the horse. Ah ! but after all," continued Athos, " I won back his trappings."

D'Artagnan made a wry face.

"Does that annoy you?" asked Athos.

"Yes, indeed, I confess it does," replied D'Artagnan; "that horse ought to have led to our recognition on the field of battle! it was a pledge—a memorial. Athos, you have done wrong."

"But, my dear fellow, put yourself in my place," replied the musketeer. "I was horribly tired of myself, and then, upon my honor, I hate English horses. Besides, if it is of any consequence that we should be recognized by any one, the saddle will do well enough for that, for it is very remarkable. As for the horse, we will find some excuse as a reason for its disappearance. What the plague! a horse is mortal. Let us say that mine had the glanders or the farcy."

But D'Artagnan did not laugh.

"I am sorry for this," continued Athos, "that you seem to set such a value on these animals, for I have not yet finished my tale."

"Why, what worse remains?"

"After having lost my horse—nine against ten, for that was the throw—the idea came into my head to stake yours."

"But you confined yourself merely to the idea, I hope?"

"No; I put it into execution instantaneously."

"Ah! was ever such a thing heard of?" exclaimed D'Artagnan, uneasily.

"I staked him—and lost."

"My horse?"

"Yes; your horse—seven against eight, for I lost only by one point. You know the old proverb."

"Athos, you have lost your senses, I swear."

"My dear fellow, it was yesterday, when I was telling you those foolish stories, that you should have said that, and not this morning. I lost him, however, with all his ornaments and trappings."

"But this is truly frightful!"

"Listen now; you have not heard the end of it yet. I should be a most excellent player if I did not get s

infatuated; but I do get infatuated, just as I am when I drink. Well, accordingly, I obstinately persevered at it."

"But what more could you stake? You had nothing left."

"Yes, yes, my friend; there remained that diamond which now glitters on your finger, and which I had noticed yesterday."

"This diamond!" exclaimed D'Artagnan, putting his hand quickly on the ring.

"And, as I am a judge of these things, having had some few of my own, I valued it at a thousand pistoles."

"I hope," said D'Artagnan, very seriously, whilst he was half dead with fright, "that you did not make any mention of my diamond?"

"On the contrary, my dear friend, do you not see that this diamond became our last resource? I might with that win back our horses and their accoutrements, and perhaps money enough for our journey."

"Athos, you make me tremble," cried D'Artagnan.

"So I mentioned your diamond to my adversary, who had also remarked it. What the plague, my dear fellow! Would you carry a star of heaven on your finger, and wish no one to observe it? Impossible!"

"Go on, my dear fellow, go on," said D'Artagnan; "for upon my honor, you horrify me with your calmness."

"We divided the diamond into ten parts of a hundred pistoles each."

"Oh! you are joking on purpose to try me," said D'Artagnan, whom anger began to catch by the hair as Minerva caught Achilles in the "Iliad."

"No, I am not joking, by heavens! I should like to have seen you in the same situation. For a whole fortnight I had not looked upon a human face, and had been there brutalizing myself by dallying only with bottles."

"That was no reason why you should stake my diamond!" said D'Artagnan, closing his hand with a nervous constriction.

"Listen, then, to the end. Ten parts, of a hundred pistoles each, would be ten throws, beyond appeal; in thirteen throws I lost all—in thirteen throws! The number 13 has *always* been fatal to me. It was the 13th of July when——"

"Zounds!" cried D'Artagnan, rising from the table, the morning's narrative making him forget that of the night before.

"Patience," said Athos. "I had formed a plan. The Englishman was an original; I had seen him in the morning talking to Grimaud, and Grimaud had informed me that he had made proposals to engage him in his service. I staked Grimaud, the silent Grimaud, divided into ten portions."

"Ah, well! was ever such a thing heard of!" said D'Artagnan, bursting out into a laugh.

"Grimaud himself—do you understand? And by these ten parts of Grimaud, who is not worth a ducat when entire, I won back the diamond. Tell me now that perseverance is not a virtue."

"Faith, it is all very droll," said the now comforted D'Artagnan, holding his sides with laughter.

"So you understand, finding myself on the right vein I began anew upon the diamond."

"Ah! the devil!" said D'Artagnan, becoming again overclouded.

"I won back your trappings, then your horse, then my own trappings, then my own horse, and then lost them all again. In short, I ended by recovering your trappings and mine; and that is how we now stand. It was a superb throw, and therefore I left off."

D'Artagnan sighed as if the weight of the hotel had been taken off his breast.

"After all, my diamond is safe," he said timidly.

"Untouched, my dear friend—besides the trappings of your Bucephalus and mine."

"But what shall we do with our saddles without horses?"

"I have an idea."

"Athos, you make me tremble."

"Listen, D'Artagnan. You have not played for a long time."

"And I have no wish to play."

"Well, don't make a row about it; you have not played for a long time; I should say, therefore, that you ought to be in luck."

"Well—and what then?"

"Well, the Englishman and his companion are still here. I observed that they regretted the trappings. You seem to value your horse; and, in your place, I would stake my trappings against my horse."

"But he would not wish for one set of trappings."

"Stake both. Egad! I am not an egotist like you."

"You would, would you?" said D'Artagnan, hesitating; for the confidence of Athos began to influence him unconsciously.

"Upon my honor, I would, on one throw."

"But having lost the horses, I should like very much to keep the trappings at least."

"Then stake your diamond."

"Oh, that is quite another thing,—never!"

"The devil! I would propose to you to stake Planchet; but as such a thing has been already done, the Englishman would not, perhaps, wish to try it again."

"Decidedly, my dear Athos," said D'Artagnan; "I would prefer risking nothing."

"It is a pity," said Athos, coldly; "the Englishman is well lined with pistoles. Egad! do try one throw—a throw is soon played."

"And if I lose?"

"You will gain."

"But if I lose?"

"Well! then you will give up the trappings."

"Well, here goes for one throw," said D'Artagnan.

Athos went to look for the Englishman and found him in the stables, where he was looking wistfully at the saddles. The opportunity was excellent. He made his conditions: the two sets of trappings against one horse,

or a hundred pistoles, at choice. The Englishman calculated quickly; the two sets of trappings were well worth three hundred pistoles, so he agreed.

D'Artagnan trembled as he threw the dice, and only turned up the number three. His paleness quite frightened Athos, who contented himself with saying:

"That's a bad throw, comrade; you will have the horse all caparisoned, sir."

The triumphant Englishman did not give himself the trouble even to shake the dice; and, so sure was he of winning, that he threw them on the table without looking. D'Artagnan turned away to hide his ill-humor.

"Well, well, well!" said Athos, in his usual calm voice, "this is a most extraordinary throw, and I have only seen it four times in my life—two aces!"

The Englishman looked and was seized with astonishment. D'Artagnan looked and reddened with joy.

"Yes," continued Athos, "only four times; once at M. de Crequis's, once at my own house in the country, in my castle of—when I had a castle; a third time at M. de Treville's, where it astonished us all; and a fourth time at a wine-shop, where it fell to me, and I lost by it a hundred louis and a supper."

"Will the gentleman take back his horse?" said the Englishman.

"Certainly!" said D'Artagnan.

"Then, there is no revenge?"

"Our conditions were, 'no revenge.' Don't you remember?"

"True. The horse shall be delivered to your servant, sir."

"One moment," said Athos. "With your permission, sir, I wish to speak a word with my friend."

"Speak."

Athos led D'Artagnan apart.

"Well!" said D'Artagnan, "what do you want with me now, tempter? You want me to play, do you not?"

"No, I want you to reflect."

"On what?"

"You are going to take the horse back?"

"Certainly."

"You are wrong. I would take the hundred pistoles. You know you staked the trappings against the horse, or a hundred pistoles, whichever you liked."

"Yes!"

"I would take the hundred pistoles."

"Would you? But I shall take the horse."

"And you are wrong, I say again. What shall we do with one horse between two? I cannot get up behind you; we shall have the appearance of the two sons of Amyon, who lost their brothers. You would not mortify me by prancing about on this magnificent steed close to my side. I would take the hundred pistoles without a moment's hesitation. We want money to return to Paris."

"I really have such a fancy for this horse, Athos."

"And you are wrong, my friend; a horse stumbles and breaks his knees; a horse eats at a rack where a glandered horse has eaten just before; and thus you lose your horse, or rather your hundred pistoles. Then it is necessary for the master to feed his horse, when, on the contrary, a hundred pistoles feed the master."

"But how shall we return?"

"On our servants' horses, to be sure. It will be evident enough from our appearance that we are people of consequence."

"A nice figure we shall cut on those hacks, whilst Aramis and Porthos are dashing about on their steeds."

"Aramis! Porthos!" exclaimed Athos, and he began to laugh heartily.

"What now?" demanded D'Artagnan, who did not understand his friend's merriment.

"Nothing, nothing. Go on," said Athos.

"And your advice is——"

"To take the hundred pistoles, D'Artagnan; with them we can feast till the end of the month. We have suffered much from fatigue, you know, and it will be well for us to repose ourselves for a time."

"I rest myself! Oh, no! Athos; immediately on my return to Paris, I shall set out in search of that unhappy lady."

"Well, do you think your horse will be as useful to you for that purpose as the gold? Take the hundred pistoles, my friend—take the hundred pistoles."

D'Artagnan only wanted a good reason for giving up, and this appeared to him an excellent one. Besides, by resisting any longer, he feared that he should appear selfish. He therefore chose the hundred pistoles, which the Englishman immediately paid him.

Their only thought then was to set out. The peace which they had finally ratified with the landlord, cost six pistoles, in addition to Athos's old horse. D'Artagnan and Athos took the horses of Planchet and Grimaud and the two valets took to the road on foot, carrying the saddles on their heads.

Badly mounted as the two friends were, they soon left their servants behind them, and arrived at Crevecœur. At a distance they saw Aramis leaning sorrowfully from the window, and like Sister Anne, looking at the dust in the horizon.

"Halloo! hey! Aramis," shouted out the two friends, "what the plague are you doing there?"

"Ah, is it you, Athos? is it you, D'Artagnan?" said the young man. "I was just thinking how rapidly the things of this world disappear. My English horse, which was getting more and more distant, and has just disappeared amidst a cloud of dust, was to me a living image of the fragility of terrestrial things. Life itself may be resolved into these three words,—'*Erat, est, fuit.*'"

"And all this really means——" inquired D'Artagnan, who began to suspect the truth.

"It means that I have just been duped in a bargain, and sold for sixty louis a horse which, by the manner in which he moves, should be able to trot five leagues an hour."

D'Artagnan and Athos burst out into a laugh.

"My dear D'Artagnan," said Aramis, "do not be too much displeased with me, I entreat you. Necessity knows no law. Besides, I am the first punished, since this infamous horse-dealer has cheated me out of fifty louis at least. Ah! you are good managers; you come on your servants' horses, and make them lead your chargers slowly and by short stages."

At this moment a wagon which for some minutes had been seen coming along the Amiens road, stopped, and out got Planchet and Grimaud with their saddles on their heads. The wagon was going empty to Paris, and the two servants had engaged, as the price of their places, to keep the wagoner in drink throughout the journey.

"What does this mean?" said Aramis, as he saw them. "Nothing but the saddles?"

"Do you understand now?" asked Athos.

"My friends, it is exactly like me. I have kept the trappings by instinct. Halloo, Bazin! lay my trappings alongside of those belonging to these gentlemen."

"And what have you done with your doctors?" demanded D'Artagnan.

"I invited them to dinner the next day, my dear fellow," said Aramis. "There is some exquisite wine here, by-the-bye, and I made them both as drunk as they could possibly be. Then the curate forbade me to abandon the uniform and the Jesuit entreated me to get him enrolled as a musketeer."

"Without a thesis," cried D'Artagnan, "without a thesis! I demand, for my part, the suppression of the thesis!"

"Since that time I have lived very agreeably. I have begun a poem in one-syllable verse; it is rather difficult, but merit of every kind consists in conquering difficulty. It is gallant in character; and I will read to you the first canto. There are four hundred lines, and they only occupy a minute."

"Faith," said D'Artagnan, who detested verses as much as he did Latin, "add to the merit of the difficulty that

of brevity, and you are, at least, sure that your poem will have two excellent points."

"Besides," continued Aramis, "it is pervaded by a virtuous passion. Well, my friends," added he, "and so we return to Paris? Bravo! I am ready. And we shall fall in with the simple Porthos once more? So much the better; you could not believe how I have missed that great ninny. I like to see him so self-complacent; it reconciles me with myself. He would not have sold his horse, even for a kingdom. I would I could see him on his horse, and in his saddle. He will have, I am sure, the look of the Great Mogul."

After they had halted an hour to rest their horses, Aramis paid his bill, placed Bazin in the wagon with his companions, and they then set out to rejoin Porthos.

They found him almost entirely cured, and, consequently, less pale than when D'Artagnan saw him at his first visit. He was seated at a table on which, although he was alone, there was displayed a dinner for four persons. This dinner consisted of viands admirably dressed, of choice wines and splendid fruit.

"Egad!" said he, rising, "you have come in the nick of time; I was just at the soup, and you will dine with me."

"Oh, oh!" said D'Artagnan, "it is not Musqueton who has lassoed such bottles as these. Besides, here is a larded fricandeau, and a fillet of beef."

"I am recruiting my strength," said Porthos; "I am recruiting my strength. Nothing weakens one so much as these devilish sprains. Did you ever have a sprain, Athos?"

"Never," said Athos; "only I remember that in our skirmish in the Rue de Féron I received a sword-thrust which, at the end of fifteen or twenty days, produced exactly the same consequences."

"But this dinner was not for yourself alone, my dear Porthos?" said Aramis.

"No," said Porthos; "I expected some gentlemen from the neighborhood, who have just sent word that

they cannot come; but as you will take their places, I lose nothing by the exchange. Halloo, Musqueton! bring chairs and let the bottles be doubled!"

"Do you know what we are eating here?" asked Athos, after ten minutes had elapsed.

"Egad!" replied D'Artagnan, "I am eating veal, larded with marrow."

"And I, veal cutlets," said Porthos.

"And I, a *blanc de volaille*," said Aramis.

"You are all mistaken, gentlemen," gravely replied Athos, "you are eating horseflesh!"

"Come, come," said D'Artagnan.

"*Horseflesh!*" cried Aramis, making a horrible face.

Porthos alone made no reply.

"Yes, the horse. Is it not so, Porthos? Are we not eating the horse, and perhaps the saddle with it?"

"No, gentlemen, I have kept the fittings."

"Faith, we are all bad alike," said Aramis; "one would say that we have done it by agreement."

"What would you have?" said Porthos; "the horse shamed my visitors, and I did not wish to humiliate them."

"So your duchess is still at the baths, is she not?" inquired D'Artagnan.

"Yes," replied Porthos. "Then the governor of the province, one of the gentlemen I expected to-day, appeared to wish so much for the horse, that I gave it to him."

"Gave it?" exclaimed D'Artagnan.

"Oh, yes—zounds, yes; that is the expression, 'gave,'" said Porthos, "for he was certainly worth a hundred and fifty louis, and the rascal would only pay me eighty."

"Without the saddle?" said Aramis.

"Yes, without the saddle."

"You observe, gentlemen," said Athos, "that after all, Porthos has made the best bargain of any of us."

There was then a perfect shout of laughter, at which poor Porthos was altogether astonished; but they soon explained to him the reason of this mirth, in which, as usual, he participated noisily.

"So we are all in cash now," said D'Artagnan.

"Not I, for one," said Athos; "I found Aramis's Spanish wine so good, that I sent sixty bottles in the wagon with the servants, which has very much impoverished me."

"And I," said Aramis, "had given almost my last sou to the church of Montdidier, and the Jesuits of Amiens, and I had, besides, made engagements which I was compelled to keep—masses ordered for myself and for you, gentlemen, which will be surely said, and by which I do not doubt we shall be greatly benefited."

"And do you imagine my sprain has cost me nothing?" said Porthos; "not to mention Musqueton's wound, for which I was obliged to have a surgeon in attendance twice a day."

"Well, well, I see," said Athos, exchanging a smile with Aramis and D'Artagnan, "that you have behaved nobly toward the poor lad. It is like a good master."

"In short," said Porthos, "when my bill is paid, I shall have about thirty crowns remaining."

"And I about ten pistoles," said Aramis.

"It appears," said Athos, "that we are the Crœsuses of the party. How much remains of your hundred pistoles, D'Artagnan?"

"Of my hundred pistoles! In the first place I gave you fifty."

"Do you think so?"

"Most assuredly."

"Ah! it is true; I recollect it."

"Then I paid six to the landlord."

"What a brute that landlord was! Why did you give him six pistoles?"

"It was you who told me to give them to him."

"It is true; in fact I am too generous—and the balance?"

"Twenty-five pistoles," said D'Artagnan.

"And I," said Athos, pulling out a few silver coins from his pocket—"see here."

"You, nothing!"

"Faith! just so, or, at any rate, so little as not to be worth adding to the common store."

"Now, let us reckon up how much we have—Porthos?"

"Thirty crowns."

"Aramis?"

"Ten pistoles."

"And you, D'Artagnan?"

"Twenty-five."

"That makes in all?" said Athos.

"Four hundred and seventy-five francs," said D'Artagnan, who calculated like Archimedes.

"When we reach Paris we shall have four hundred," said Porthos, "besides the trappings of what were once our horses."

"But our regimental charges?" said Aramis.

"Well! the four nags of our servants will procure two fit for their masters, which we must draw lots for; with the four hundred livres we can get half a horse for one of the dismounted ones, and then we can give the rakings of our pockets to D'Artagnan, who is in luck, and he shall go and stake them at the first tennis court we come to. There, now!"

"Let us dine!" said Porthos, "for the second course is getting cold."

And the four friends, now more at ease concerning the future, did honor to the repast, of which the remnants were abandoned to Musqueton, Bazin, Planchet and Grimaud.

On arriving at Paris D'Artagnan found a note from M. des Essarts, announcing that as his majesty had determined on opening the campaign on the first of May, he must immediately make ready his equipments.

He ran at once to his friends, whom he had only quitted half an hour before and whom he found very sorrowful, or rather, very anxious. They were holding a grand consultation at Athos's, which always indicated a concern of some importance.

They had, in fact, each received a similar note from M. de Treville.

The four philosophers looked at one another in great

amazement; M. de Treville never jested on a matter of discipline.

"And at what sum do you estimate these equipments?" asked D'Artagnan.

"Oh, one cannot say!" replied Aramis; "we have just made our calculations with Spartan parsimony, and fifteen hundred livres will be absolutely necessary for each."

"Four times fifteen makes sixty; that is six thousand livres," said Athos.

"For my part," said D'Artagnan, "I think that a thousand livres would be sufficient for each. It is true that I speak not as a Spartan, but as an attorney."

This word *attorney* roused Porthos.

"Stop! I have an idea," said he.

"That is a something, however; as for myself," coolly observed Athos, "I have not even the shadow of one; but, as for D'Artagnan, he is beside himself, gentlemen. A thousand livres! why, for my part alone, I am certain I shall want two thousand."

"Four times two makes eight," said D'Artagnan; "so we shall want eight thousand livres for our accoutrements. It is true we have already got the saddles."

"But more than that," said Athos, waiting till D'Artagnan, who was going to thank M. de Treville, had shut the door before he brought to light his idea, so full of promise for the future—"more than that, there is the beautiful diamond which sparkles on the finger of our friend. By all the saints! D'Artagnan is too good a comrade to leave his brothers in difficulty when he carries a king's ransom on his middle finger."

CHAPTER XXIX.

THE HUNT AFTER EQUIPMENTS.

THE most thoughtful of the four friends was certainly D'Artagnan, although in his capacity of guardsman it

was much more easy to equip him than the musketeers, who were men of rank. But our Gascon youth was, as may have been seen, of a character not only provident but almost parsimonious; yet at the same time (explain the contradiction) almost as vainglorious as Porthos. To the thoughtfulness originating in vanity was now added a less selfish anxiety. Whatever inquiries he had made concerning Madame Bonancieux, he could obtain no tidings of her; M. de Treville had spoken of her to the queen, but the queen did not know what had become of her, and promised to have investigations set on foot. This promise, however, was vague and afforded scanty satisfaction to the troubled D'Artagnan.

Athos never left his own apartment; he was determined not to take a single step to equip himself.

"There are fifteen days remaining yet," said he to his friends. "Well, if at the end of those fifteen days I have found nothing, or rather, if nothing has come to find me, as I am too good a Catholic to blow my brains out with a pistol, I will seek a good quarrel with four of his eminence's guards, or with eight Englishmen, and I will fight till one of them kills me; which, calculating the number, can hardly fail to come to pass quite soon. It will then be said that I died in the king's service, so that I shall have served without needing to furnish myself with equipments."

Porthos continued to walk with his hands behind his back, saying:

"I will pursue my idea."

Aramis, thoughtful and reserved, said nothing.

It may be seen from these disastrous details that desolation reigned throughout the little community.

The servants, on their sides, like the coursers of Hippolytus, partook of their masters' bitter grief. Musqueton made a store of crusts; Bazin, who had always leaned toward devotion, never quitted the churches; Planchet watched the flies buzzing about; and Grimaud, whom the general distress could not induce to break the

silence which his master had imposed, sighed in a way to melt the hearts of stones.

The three friends—for, as we have already said, Athos had sworn not to stir an inch in search of equipments—went out early and came in late. They wandered through the streets, looking in every gutter to see if any passenger might not have dropped a purse. They might have been supposed to be following a trail, so watchful were they at every step. And when they met, their desponding looks seemed to ask of one another: "Have you found anything?"

Nevertheless, as Porthos had been the first to scent an idea, and as he had steadily pursued it, he was the first to act. He was a man of action, this worthy Porthos. D'Artagnan saw him one day going toward the Church of St. Leu, and instinctively followed him. He entered the sacred edifice, after having raised his mustache and pulled out his imperial, which operations always portended on his part the most indomitable intentions. As D'Artagnan took some precautions to conceal himself Porthos fancied that he had not been perceived. D'Artagnan entered after him. Porthos went and ensconced himself on one side of a pillar and D'Artagnan, still unseen, leaned himself against the other.

There was a sermon and the church was therefore full. Porthos took advantage of this circumstance to ogle the ladies. Thanks to Musqueton's care, his external appearance was far from announcing the internal distress. His hat was, indeed, somewhat napless and his feather rather drooping; his embroidery was slightly tarnished and his lace a little frayed; but in the subdued light these trifles disappeared and Porthos still looked the handsome Porthos.

D'Artagnan perceived, on a bench near the pillar against which Porthos and he were leaning, a sort of mature beauty, a little yellow and slightly withered, but yet upright and haughty under her black head-dress. The eyes of Porthos were furtively directed to this lady

and then fluttered vaguely over the other parts of the church. On her part the lady, from time to time, blushed, and with the rapidity of lightning cast a glance at the inconstant Porthos, whose eyes immediately fluttered away with greater activity. It was quite clear that was a game which much piqued the lady in the dark hood; for she bit her lips till they nearly bled, scratched her head and fidgeted desperately on her seat.

As soon as Porthos saw this he once more curled his mustache, again twisted his imperial, and then began to make signals to a fair lady who was near the choir, and who was not only a fair lady, but undoubtedly a lady of some consequence; for she had behind her a little negro boy, who had carried the cushion on which she knelt, and a waiting-woman, who carried the coroneted bag in which she brought her mass book.

The lady in the black hood slyly observed all these glances of Porthos and remarked that they were fixed upon the lady with the velvet cushion, the little negro and the waiting-woman.

In the meantime Porthos was playing hard—winking his eyes, pressing a finger on his lips and calling up little killing smiles, which were really stabbing the susceptible dame he scorned.

Thus it was that, by way of *mea culpa*, and whilst beating her hand against her breast, she sent forth a resounding sigh, so that everybody, even the lady with the red cushion, turned to look at her. Porthos was impenetrable; he had understood it well, but pretended to be deaf.

The lady with the red cushion produced a very striking effect, for she was extremely beautiful. She made a great impression on the lady in the black hood, who saw in her a truly formidable rival, a great impression upon Porthos, who thought her both much younger and much prettier than the lady in the black hood, and lastly, a great impression upon D'Artagnan, who recognized in her the lady of Meung, of Calais and of Dover, whom

his persecutor, the man with a scar, had addressed by the title of Milady.

D'Artagnan, without losing sight of this lady with the velvet cushion, continued to watch Porthos's game, which highly amused him. He ventured a guess that this lady in the black hood was the solicitor's wife of the Rue aux Ours, especially as that street was not far from the Church of St. Leu.

He then, by inference, divined that Porthos wished to revenge his defeat at Chantilly, when the lady had shown herself so refractory in regard to her purse.

But amidst all this D'Artagnan thought he could remark that no sign responded to the gallantries of Porthos. It was all chimera and illusion ; but even for an actual love and for a well founded jealousy what other realities are there but illusions and chimeras ?

As soon as the sermon was ended the solicitor's wife went toward the vessel containing the holy water. Porthos hastened to it before her, and instead of putting in only one finger he immersed his whole hand. The lady smiled, in the belief that it was for her that Porthos had taken so much trouble, but she was quickly and cruelly undeceived ; whilst she was only about three paces from him he turned aside his head, keeping his eyes invariably fixed upon the lady with the red cushion, who had arisen and, followed by her negro boy and waiting-woman, was approaching where he stood.

As she approached Porthos he drew his hands, all dripping with holy water, out of the vessel ; the beautiful devotee touched with her slender fingers the enormous hand of Porthos, smiled as she made the sign of the cross, and left the church.

This was too much for the solicitor's wife, who no longer doubted that there was an understanding between this lady and Porthos ; if she had been a lady of quality she would have fainted, but as she was only a solicitor's wife she contented herself with saying in a concentrated rage :

" So, M. Porthos ! you do not offer me any holy water ? "

Porthos at these words started like a man awakening from a sleep of a thousand years.

"Ah, madame!" exclaimed he, "it is indeed you? How is your husband, that dear M. Coquenard? Is he still as stingy as ever? Where could my eyes have been that I did not once perceive you during the two mortal hours the sermon lasted?"

"I was only two paces from you, sir," responded the attorney's wife; "but you did not perceive me because you had no eyes except for that beautiful lady to whom you just now offered the holy water."

Porthos pretended to be confused.

"Ah," said he, "you observed it, did you?"

"One must have been blind not to have seen it."

"Yes," said Porthos, with indifference, "it is one of my friends—a duchess—whom I have some difficulty in meeting on account of the jealousy of her husband, and who apprised me that, for the sole purpose of seeing me, she would come to-day to this wretched church in this abominable neighborhood."

"M. Porthos," said the attorney's wife, "will you have the goodness to favor me with your arm for a few minutes? I should be glad to have some conversation with you."

"How is that, madame?" said Porthos, winking to himself like a player who grins at the dupe he is about to ensnare.

Just at this moment D'Artagnan passed, in pursuit of the lady. He slyly glanced at Porthos and saw that triumphant wink.

"Ah," said he to himself, reasoning after the peculiarly easy morality of that age of gallantry, "here is one who may readily be equipped by the proper time."

Porthos, yielding to the pressure of the lady's arm, as a vessel yields to the helm, reached the Cloister of St. Magloire, a retired spot, which was closed by a turnstile at either end. In the daytime nobody was to be seen there but beggars at their meals or children at play.

"Ah! M. Porthos," exclaimed the attorney's wife,

when she was assured that none but the habitual population of the place could see or hear them: "ah! M. Porthos, you are a great conqueror, it appears."

"I, madame?" said Porthos, bridling up; how so?"

"Witness the signs just now, and the holy water. But she must be a princess, at the least, that lady, with her negro boy and her waiting-woman!"

"You are mistaken. Good Lord! no; she is positively only a duchess."

"And that courier who was waiting at the door and that carriage with the coachman in magnificent livery!"

Porthos had seen neither courier nor carriage, but Madame Coquenard, with the glance of a jealous woman, had seen all.

Porthos regretted that he had not made the lady with the red cushion a princess at once.

"Ah! you are the pet of all the most beautiful women, M. Porthos," resumed the attorney's wife with a sigh.

"But," replied Porthos, "with such a figure as nature has bestowed on me, how can I avoid conquests?"

"My God! how quickly you men forget!" exclaimed the attorney's wife, raising her eyes to heaven.

"Less quickly than women, I think," replied Porthos. "For, after all, I may say, madame, that I have been your victim, when, wounded and dying, I saw myself abandoned by the surgeons; I, the offspring of an illustrious family, who had depended on your friendship, came near dying, of my wounds first and of hunger afterward, in a miserable wine-shop at Chantilly, and that without your deigning even to answer the burning epistles which I wrote to you."

"But, M. Porthos——" muttered the solicitor's wife, who felt that, if judged by the conduct of the noblest dames of the age, she was very wrong.

"I," continued Porthos, "who for your sake had sacrificed the Countess of Penaflor——"

"I know it well."

"The Baroness of——"

"M. Porthos, do not overwhelm me!"

"The Countess of——"

"M. Porthos, be generous!"

"You are right, madame; I will not proceed."

"But it is my husband who will not listen to a word about advances."

"Madame Coquenard," said Porthos, "do you remember the first letter which you wrote me, and which I cherish, engraven on my heart?"

The lady groaned.

"But," said she, "the sum which you proposed to borrow was really out of all proportion."

"Madame Coquenard, I gave you the preference. I had only to write to the Duchess of—but I will not mention her name, for I know not what it is to compromise a woman; but this I do know, that I had but to write to her and she immediately sent me fifteen hundred."

The attorney's wife let drop a tear.

"M. Porthos," said she, "I swear to you that you have sufficiently punished me; and if in future you should ever again be so circumstanced, you have only to apply to me."

"Fie, madame!" said Porthos, as though disgusted; "do not let us allude to money, it is too humiliating!"

"Then you no longer esteem me!" said the attorney's wife slowly and sorrowfully.

Porthos maintained a majestic silence.

"And is it thus you answer me? Alas! I understand."

"Think of the offense which you have given me, madame; it is indelible here!" said Porthos, putting his hand over his heart and pressing it with force.

"But I will repair it, my dear Monsieur Porthos."

"Besides, what did I ask of you?" continued Porthos, shrugging his shoulders with an air of the utmost simplicity. "A loan—nothing more. I know that you are not rich, Madame Coquenard, and that your husband is

obliged to fleece his poor clients to gain a few pitiful crowns. Oh! if you had been a countess, a marchioness, or a duchess, it would have been another thing and you would have been indeed unpardonable."

The solicitor's wife was piqued.

"Learn, M. Porthos," said he, "that my strong-box, although the strong-box of a solicitor's wife, is probably far better furnished than that of half a dozen ruined demireps."

"Then you have doubly offended me, Madame Coquenard," said Porthos, disengaging the arm of the attorney's wife from his own; "for if you are rich your refusal was more than ever inexcusable."

"When I say rich," replied the attorney's wife, who saw that she had gone too far, "you must not take my words too literally. I am not precisely rich, but in easy circumstances."

"Come, madame," said Porthos, "let us say no more about it; you have misunderstood me and all sympathy between us is at an end."

"Ungrateful man!"

"Ah, I advise you to complain!" said Porthos.

"Go to your beautiful duchess! Let me no longer restrain you."

"Ah! she is not yet so angry, I believe."

"Come, then, M. Porthos," said Madame Coquenard, "once more, and it is the last time—do you still love me?"

"Alas, madame," replied Porthos, in the most melancholy tone he could assume, "when one is about to commence a campaign in which my presentiments assure me I shall be killed——"

"Oh, do not say such things!" exclaimed the attorney's wife, bursting into sobs.

"Something tells me that it will be so," said Porthos, becoming more and more melancholy.

"Say, rather, that you have formed another attachment."

"No, I speak frankly to you. No new object has

engaged my thoughts, and, indeed, I feel something at the bottom of my heart which speaks for you. But in a fortnight, as you do or do not know, this fatal campaign will open, and I shall be dreadfully busy about my equipment. Besides, I must go into Brittany to my own family, to provide the funds necessary for my departure!"

Porthos observed a last struggle between love and avarice.

"And as," continued he, "the duchess whom you saw just now has an estate next to mine, we shall go down together. A journey, you know, appears much shorter when one travels in company."

"Have you no friends in Paris, M. Porthos?" asked the attorney's wife.

"I *once* believed I had," said Porthos, resuming his melancholy manner; "but I have clearly seen that I deceived myself."

"You have! you have, M. Porthos," exclaimed the attorney's wife, in a transport which inspired even herself. "Come to our house to-morrow. You are the son of my aunt, consequently my cousin; you come from Noyon, in Picardy, and you have several lawsuits on your hands and no attorney. Can you remember all this?"

"Perfectly, madame."

"Come at dinner time."

"Very well."

"And stand your ground before my husband, who is as shrewd as a weasel in spite of his seventy-six years!"

"Seventy-six years! Plague take it! a fine age!" replied Porthos.

"A great age, you mean to say, M. Porthos. So that the poor dear man might leave one a widow at a moment's notice," added the lady, casting a significant glance at Porthos. "Fortunately, by our marriage contract, all the property reverts to the survivor."

"All?" said Porthos.

"Yes, all."

"You are a truly provident woman, I perceive, my charming Madame Coquenard," said Porthos, tenderly pressing the lady's hand.

"Then we are completely reconciled, my dear M. Porthos?" said she, in a most insinuating tone.

"For life," replied Porthos, in the same manner. "Farewell, then, till our next meeting, traitress!"

"Till our next meeting, forgetful one!"

"Till to-morrow, my angel!"

"Till to-morrow, light of my life!"

CHAPTER XXX.

"MILADY."

D'ARTAGNAN had followed the other lady from the church, without being observed by her. He saw her enter her carriage and heard the orders given to her coachman to drive to St. Germain.

It was useless to attempt to follow on foot a carriage which was drawn by two fine horses at a fast trot, and D'Artagnan therefore returned to the Rue Ferou.

In the Rue de Seine he met Planchet, who had stopped before a pastry-cook's shop and appeared to be in an ecstasy at the sight of a cake of tempting form.

D'Artagnan ordered him to go and saddle two horses at M. de Treville's stable, one for each of them, and to come to him at Athos's lodgings. M. de Treville had given D'Artagnan a general permission to avail himself of his stables.

Planchet took his way toward the Rue du Colombier, and D'Artagnan to the Rue Ferou. Athos was at home, gloomily emptying one of the bottles of that famous Spanish wine which he had brought with him from Picardy. He gave Grimaud a sign to bring a glass for D'Artagnan, and Grimaud obeyed with his habitual taciturnity.

D'Artagnan related to Athos all that had occurred at the church between the attorney's wife and Porthos, and how their companion was already in a fair way of obtaining his equipments.

"For my part," said Athos, in answer to this recital, "I am sure enough that it will not be women who will be at the expense of my fittings-out."

"And yet, my dear Athos, handsome and refined and noble as you are, neither princesses, nor even queens are above those you might seek to win."

At this moment Planchet modestly thrust his head through the half-open door and announced that the horses were there.

"What horses?" asked Athos.

"Two which M. de Treville lends me, with which I am going to St. Germain."

"And what are you going to do at St. Germain?" inquired Athos.

D'Artagnan then proceeded to inform him of his having seen at the church that lady, who, in conjunction with the gentleman in the black cloak and with the scar upon his forehead, had been the unceasing subject of his thoughts.

"That is to say, that you are in love with this one now, as you were with Madame Bonancieux," ejaculated Athos, shrugging his shoulders as if in contempt of human weakness.

"Not at all," exclaimed D'Artagnan. "I am only curious to penetrate the mystery with which she surrounds herself. I know not why, but I fancy that this woman, unknown as she is to me and as I am to her, has hitherto exercised a mysterious influence upon my life."

"You are right; in fact," said Athos, "I am not acquainted with any woman who is worth the trouble of being sought after when she is once lost. Madame Bonancieux is lost; so much the worse for her; let her get herself found again."

"No, Athos, no; you deceive yourself," said D'Ar-

tagnan. "I love poor Constance more fondly than ever; and if I only knew where she now is, were it even at the extremity of the world, I would set out to drag her from her enemies. But I know it not and all my efforts to discover it have been in vain. What is to be done? One must seek some diversion."

"Divert yourself with Milady, then, my dear D'Artagnan, I recommend it with all my heart, if that will amuse you."

"But, Athos," said D'Artagnan, "instead of keeping yourself here, secluded like a prisoner, get upon a horse and ride with me to St. Germain."

"My friend," said Athos, "I ride on horseback if I have a horse; if not, I walk."

"Well, for my part," said D'Artagnan, smiling at that misanthropy in Athos which, in another, would have offended him, "I am not so proud as you are; I ride whatever I can find. So farewell, my dear Athos."

"Farewell," said the musketeer, as he made a sign to Grimaud to uncork the bottle he had brought.

D'Artagnan and Planchet got into their saddles and took the road to St. Germain.

As they went along D'Artagnan could not help thinking of all that Athos had said to him about Madame Bonancieux. Although he was not of a very sentimental nature, yet the pretty seamstress had made a genuine impression on his heart; and he was, as he had said, ready to go to the end of the world to find her. But the world, being round, has so many ends that he did not know in what direction to turn.

In the meantime he would try to find out who this lady was. She had talked to the man in the dark cloak and, therefore, she was acquainted with him.

Now the man with the dark cloak had, in D'Artagnan's opinion, certainly carried off Madame Bonancieux the second time, as well as the first. D'Artagnan, therefore, was only telling half a lie, which is not much of one when he said that by his pursuit of this lady he was at the same time seeking Constance.

Thus meditating, and touching his horse occasionally with the spur, D'Artagnan had traversed the distance and reached St. Germain. He went skirting the pavilion where ten years afterward Louis XIV. was born. He was passing through a very solitary street, looking right and left to see if he could discover some vestige of his beautiful Englishwoman, when, on the ground floor of a pretty house, which, according to the custom of the time, had no window toward the street, he recognized a countenance he knew. The person was walking on a sort of terrace ornamented with flowers. Planchet was the first to recognize him.

"Eh, sir," said he, "do you not remember that face which is now gaping at the crows?"

"No," said D'Artagnan; "and yet I am convinced it is not the first time that I have seen it."

"Egad! I believe you," said Planchet; "it is that poor Lubin, the valet of the Count de Wardes, whom you settled so thoroughly a month ago at Calais on the way to the governor's house."

"Oh, yes," said D'Artagnan, "I remember him now. Do you think he would recognize you?"

"Faith, sir, he was in such a terrible fright that I doubt whether he has a clear recollection of either of us."

"Well, then," said D'Artagnan, "go and chat with him, and ascertain whether his master is dead."

Planchet dismounted and went up to Lubin, who, in reality, did not recognize him; and the two valets began to converse together with the utmost good-fellowship, whilst D'Artagnan pushed the horse down a lane, and turning behind a house, returned to assist at the conference, concealed by a hedge of hazel bushes.

After a minute's observation behind the hedge he heard the sound of wheels and saw the carriage of the unknown lady stop not thirty paces off. There could be no doubt about it, for the lady was inside. D'Artagnan bent down over his horse's neck that he might see everything without being himself seen.

The lady put her charming fair head out of the door and gave some orders to her maid.

The latter, a pretty girl of from twenty to two-and-twenty years of age, alert and animated, the fit Abigail of a woman of fashion, jumped down the steps, on which she had been seated, according to the custom of the time, and went toward the terrace where D'Artagnan had seen Lubin.

D'Artagnan followed the waiting-woman with his eyes and saw her going toward the terrace. But as it happened, an order from the house had called away Lubin, so that Planchet remained alone, peering about to see in what direction his master had concealed himself.

The waiting-woman approached Planchet, whom she mistook for Lubin, and handed him a small note.

"For your master," said she.

"For my master?" said Planchet in astonishment.

"Yes, and in great haste; take it quickly, then."

She then hastened toward the carriage, which had already turned in the direction whence it had come, jumped on the steps, and the vehicle rolled away.

Planchet turned the note over and over again, and then, accustomed to passive obedience, he jumped down from the terrace, went along the lane, and at twenty paces distant met his master, who, having seen all the proceedings, was hurrying toward him.

"For you, sir," said Planchet, handing the note to the young man.

"For me!" said D'Artagnan; "are you quite sure?"

"Egad! I am quite sure of it; for the maid said 'For your master,' and I have no other than you; so—a pretty slip of a girl that maid is, too, upon my word."

D'Artagnan opened the letter and read these words:

"One who interests herself about you more than she chooses now to tell, would be glad to know what day you will be able to walk out in the forest. A valet in black and red will be waiting to-morrow at the hotel of the Field of the Cloth of Gold, for your reply."

"Oh, oh!" said D'Artagnan, "this is rather ardent

It seems that Milady and I are anxious about the health of the same person. Well, Planchet, how is this good M. de Wardes? He is not dead, then?"

"No, sir; he is as well as a man can be with four sword-wounds in his body—for you sent four into the dear gentleman—and he is yet weak, having lost almost all his blood. As I told you, sir, Lubin did not recognize me, and related to me the whole of our joint adventure."

"Well done, Planchet! You are the very king of valets; and now mount your horse again and let's overtake the carriage."

This did not take them a long time; in about five minutes they saw the carriage stopping in the road and a richly dressed cavalier waiting at its door.

The conversation between the lady and this cavalier was so animated that D'Artagnan drew up on the other side of the carriage without being observed by any one but the pretty waiting-maid.

The conversation was in English, which D'Artagnan did not understand; but by the accent the young man thought he could perceive that the beautiful Englishwoman was very angry. She concluded by a gesture which left no doubt about the nature of the conversation—it was a blow with her fan, applied with such force that the pretty feminine toy flew into a thousand pieces.

The cavalier burst into a roar of laughter which appeared to exasperate the lady.

D'Artagnan thought that now was the time to interpose; he therefore approached the other door, and taking his hat off respectfully:

"Madame," said he, "will you permit me to offer my services? It appears that this gentleman has offended you. Say one word, madame, and I will immediately punish him for his want of courtesy."

At the first words the lady turned and looked at the young man with astonishment, and when he had ended:

"Sir," said she, in very good French, "I would put myself under your protection with the greatest pleasure,

if the person with whom I have quarrelled were not my brother."

"Ah, excuse me," said D'Artagnan, "I was not aware of that, madame."

"What is that presumptuous fellow interfering about?" exclaimed the gentleman whom the lady had claimed as her relation, lowering his head to the height of the door; "why does he not go on about his business?"

"Presumptuous fellow, yourself!" said D'Artagnan, bending on the neck of his horse, and answering through the other door. "I do not go simply because it is my pleasure to remain."

The gentleman spoke a few words in English to his sister.

"I speak French to you, sir," said D'Artagnan; "do me the favor, then, I beseech you, to answer in the same language. You are the lady's brother, but happily you are not mine."

It might have been imagined that the lady, timid as women generally are, would interpose at the commencement of this quarrel to prevent its proceeding further; but, on the contrary, she threw herself back in her carriage and coolly ordered the coachman to drive to the hotel.

The pretty waiting-maid threw a glance of anxiety at D'Artagnan, whose good looks seemed not to have been lost upon her.

The carriage hurried on and left the two men face to face. No material obstacle now intervened between them.

The cavalier made a movement to follow the carriage, but D'Artagnan—whose already boiling anger was still further increased by recognizing in him the Englishman who, at Amiens, had won his horse and was very near winning his diamond from Athos—seized him by the bridle and stopped him.

"Ah, sir," said he, "you appear to be even a more presumptuous fellow than I am, for you pretend to forget that there is already a little quarrel between us."

"Ah, ah!" cried the Englishman, "is it you, my

young master? Then one must always be playing some game or other with you?"

"Yes; and that reminds me that I have a revenge to take. We will see, my dear sir, whether you are as skillful with the sword as with the dice-box."

"You perceive," said the Englishman, "that I have no sword with me. Would you show off your courage against an unarmed man?"

"I hope that you have got one at home," said D'Artagnan; "if not, I have two and will play you for one."

"Quite unnecessary," said the Englishman; "I am sufficiently provided with that kind of thing."

"Well, then, my worthy sir," replied D'Artagnan, "choose the largest and come and show it me this evening."

"Oh, certainly, if you desire it."

"Behind the Luxembourg there is a charming spot for promenades of the sort that I am inviting you to."

"Very well, I will be there."

"Your hour?"

"Six o'clock."

"Apropos, you have probably one or two friends?"

"I have three who will consider it an honor to play the same game as myself."

"Three—capital! How well this falls out!" said D'Artagnan; "three is precisely my own number."

"And now who are you?" demanded the Englishman.

"I am M. d'Artagnan, a Gascon gentleman, serving in the guards in the company of M. des Essarts; and who, pray, are you?"

"I am Lord de Winter, Baron of Sheffield."

"Well, then, I am your humble servant, my lord," said D'Artagnan, "although you have names which are rather hard to remember."

And spurring his horse, he held him to the gallop and took the road to Paris.

As he was accustomed to do in like circumstances, D'Artagnan went straight to Athos's lodgings.

He found the musketeer stretched upon a large couch,

where he was waiting, as he said, for his equipment to come to him.

He told Athos all that had occurred, omitting only the letter to M. de Wardes.

Athos was quite enchanted when he heard he was going to fight an Englishman. We have said that it was his great ambition.

They sent their servants instantly to look for Aramis and Porthos and to let them know what was going on.

Porthos drew his sword from its scabbard and began to lunge at the wall, drawing back from time to time and capering about like a dancer. Aramis, who was working hard at his poem, shut himself up in Athos's closet and begged that he might not be disturbed again until it was time to draw his sword. Athos, by a signal to Grimaud, demanded another bottle. D'Artagnan arranged a little plan in his own mind, of which we shall, hereafter, see the execution; a plan that promised him an agreeable adventure, as might be seen by the smiles which from time to time passed across his face and lighted up its thoughtfulness.

CHAPTER XXXI.

ENGLISH AND FRENCH.

At the appointed time the four guardsmen proceeded with their servants to an inclosure behind the Luxembourg, which was kept as a pasture for goats. Athos gave some money to the goatherd to keep out of the way, and the valets were ordered to do duty as sentinels.

A silent troop soon came to the same field and joined the musketeers; and then, according to the English custom, the introductions took place.

The Englishmen were all persons of the highest rank. The singular names of the three friends were, therefore, not only a subject of surprise to them, but also of disquietude.

"After all," said Lord de Winter, when the three friends had been named, "we know not who you are, and we will not fight with men bearing such names. These names of yours are clowns' names."

"As you imagine, my lord, they *are* false names," said Athos.

"Which makes us more desirous of knowing your real ones," said the Englishman.

"You have played against us without knowing them," said Athos, "and as a token of it, won our horses."

"It is true; but then we only hazarded our pistoles, now we peril our blood. A man may play with anybody, but one only fights with one's equals."

"That is fair," said Athos.

He then took aside the Englishman with whom he was to fight and told him his name in a whisper. Porthos and Aramis did the same.

"Does that satisfy you?" asked Athos of his adversary, "and do you find me sufficiently noble to do me the favor to cross swords with me?"

"Yes, sir," said the Englishman, bowing.

"Well, then, now you will allow me to say one thing to you?" coolly resumed Athos.

"What is that?" said the Englishman.

"It is, that you would have done well not to insist on my making myself known."

"Why so?"

"Because I am thought to be dead. I have reasons for desiring that it may not be known that I am alive; therefore I shall be obliged to kill you, that my secret may not be divulged."

The Englishman looked at Athos, thinking the latter was jesting. But Athos was in serious earnest.

"Gentlemen," said he, addressing his companions and their adversaries, "are we all ready?"

"Yes!" replied, with one voice, both English and French.

"Guard, then!"

And immediately eight swords glittered in the rays of

the setting sun and the combat began with a fury which was natural enough between men who were doubly enemies.

Athos fenced with as much calmness and method as if he had been in a school of arms.

Porthos, cured no doubt of over-confidence by his adventure at Chantilly, played a game full of dexterity and prudence.

Aramis, who had the third canto of his poem to finish, worked away like a man in a hurry.

Athos was the first to kill his adversary. He had only given him one wound but, as he had forewarned him that one was mortal, for it passed directly through his heart.

Porthos next stretched his opponent on the grass, having pierced his thigh. Then, as the Englishman had given up his sword, Porthos took him in his arms and carried him to his carriage.

Aramis pushed his so vigorously that after having driven him back fifty paces he ended by disabling him.

As for D'Artagnan, he had simply and purely played a defensive game. Then when he saw that his adversary was quite weary, by a vigorous thrust he disarmed him. The baron, finding himself without a sword, retreated two or three steps, but his foot slipping as he stepped away, he fell upon his back.

With one bound D'Artagnan was upon him and pointing his sword at his throat,—

"I could kill you, sir," said he to the Englishman, "but I give you life from love to your sister."

D'Artagnan was overwhelmed with joy; he had accomplished the plan he had designed, whose development now brightened his face with smiles.

The Englishman, enchanted at having to deal with so complete a gentleman, pressed D'Artagnan in his arms and complimented the three musketeers a thousand times. And then, as Porthos's adversary was already installed in the carriage and Aramis's had fairly run away, they had only to attend to Athos's victim.

As Porthos and Aramis undressed him in the hope that his wound was not mortal, a heavy purse fell from his belt. D'Artagnan picked it up and presented it to Lord de Winter.

"Ah, and what the deuce am I to do with that?" said the Englishman.

"You will restore it to his family," said D'Artagnan.

"His family will care but little about this trifle. They will inherit an income of fifteen thousand louis. Keep this purse for your valets."

D'Artagnan put the purse in his pocket.

"And now, my young friend—for I hope that you will permit me to call you by that name," said Lord de Winter, "I will, if you wish, present you this evening to my sister, for I wish her ladyship to take you into her favor; and as she is not entirely without influence at court, perhaps a word from her may be useful to you hereafter."

D'Artagnan glowed with delight and gave an assenting bow.

During this scene Athos came up to D'Artagnan.

"What do you propose to do with that purse?" he said to him in a low tone, privately.

"I proposed to place it in your hands, my dear Athos."

"Mine? Why would you do that?"

"*Parbleu!* You killed him; these are the spoils of war."

"I inherit from an enemy!" said Athos. "What, then, do you think of me?"

"It is the custom of war," said D'Artagnan. "Why should it not be the custom in a duel?"

"Even on the field of battle," replied Athos, "I have never done that."

Porthos shrugged his shoulders. Aramis, with a movement of his lips, gave signs of approval.

"Then," said D'Artagnan, "let us give that money to the lackeys, as Lord de Winter suggested."

"Yes," said Athos, "let us give this purse, not to our own, but to the English servants."

Athos took the purse and threw it to the coachman.

"For you and your comrades!" cried he.

Such loftiness of spirit in a man without a penny struck even Porthos himself; and this French generosity, being told by Lord de Winter to his friends, had a great effect everywhere, except with Messieurs Grimaud, Planchet, Musqueton and Bazin.

As Lord de Winter left D'Artagnan he gave him his sister's address. She lived at No. 6, in the Place Royale, which was at that time the fashionable part of the town. He also engaged to call for him to present him, and D'Artagnan made an appointment for eight o'clock, at Athos's chambers.

This presentation to "Milady" occupied all the thoughts of our young Gascon. He recalled the singular manner in which this young woman had before then crossed his path; and although convinced that she was but one of the cardinal's tools, he yet felt himself irresistibly drawn to her by a sentiment that was inexplicable. His only fear was that she might recognize him as the man whom she had seen at Meung and at Dover. Then she would also know that he was a friend of M. de Treville and, consequently, was heart and soul devoted to the king; and this would involve a loss of much of his advantage over her, since as soon as she knew him as well as he knew her the game between them would be equal. As for her incipient intrigue with M. de Wardes our self-complacent gentleman thought but little of that, although the count was young, rich, handsome, and high in favor with the cardinal. It is a good thing to be twenty years of age and, moreover, a native of Tarbes.

D'Artagnan began by dressing himself in magnificent style at home, and he then went to Athos and, according to his custom, told him everything. Athos listened to his projects, then shook his head and recommended prudence in a tone almost of bitterness.

"What!" said he, "you have just lost one woman whom you thought good, charming, perfect, and now you are running after another."

D'Artagnan felt the justice of the reproach.

"I love Madame Bonancieux," said he, "with my heart; but I love 'Milady' with my head; and by going to her house I hope to enlighten myself as to the character she plays at court."

"Egad! the character she plays is not difficult to guess, after all that you have told me. She is some emissary of the cardinal's, a woman who will draw you into a trap where you will right easily leave your head."

"The plague! My dear Athos, you seem to me to look at things on the dark side."

"My dear fellow, I distrust women—what would you have? I have paid for my experience. And particularly fair women. This lady is fair, did you not say?"

"She has the finest light hair that was ever seen."

"Ah! my poor D'Artagnan!" said Athos.

"Listen: I wish to enlighten myself, and then, when I have learnt what I want to know, I will leave her."

"Enlighten yourself, then!" said Athos, coldly.

Lord de Winter arrived at the appointed time, but Athos, who had been warned beforehand, went into the inner room. His lordship, therefore, found D'Artagnan alone, and as it was nearly eight o'clock they set out at once.

An elegant carriage was in waiting at the door, and as two excellent horses were harnessed to it they were almost immediately at the Place Royale.

Her ladyship received D'Artagnan graciously. Her house was furnished with remarkable splendor; and although the English generally, frightened away by the war, were quitting or were about to quit France, she proved by the new outlays which she had just made, that the public measures which drove away the English had no influence on her.

"You see," said Lord de Winter, as he presented D'Artagnan to his sister, "a young gentleman who had my life in his hands, but would not misuse his advantage, although we were doubly enemies, since it was I

who insulted him and I am, also, an Englishman. Thank him, therefore, madame, on my behalf, if you have any good will for me."

The lady slightly frowned; an almost imperceptible cloud passed over her brow, and then a smile so singular appeared upon her lips that the young man, who saw this triple change, almost shuddered.

Her brother observed nothing, for he had turned aside to play with the lady's favorite monkey, who had pulled him by the doublet.

"Welcome, sir," said the lady, in a voice the singular softness of which contrasted strangely with the symptoms of ill-humor which D'Artagnan had just observed, "for you have this day acquired a lasting claim upon my gratitude."

The Englishman then turned toward them and related all the circumstances of the combat. Her ladyship listened with the greatest attention, yet it was easy to see that in spite of her endeavors to conceal her emotion the account was not agreeable to her. The blood mounted to her face and her little foot trembled beneath her dress.

Lord de Winter perceived nothing of this, for as soon as he had ended he went to a table on which there was a salver with a bottle of Spanish wine upon it, and filling two glasses he invited D'Artagnan to drink.

D'Artagnan knew that it would displease an Englishman to decline a toast. He went, therefore, to the table and took the second glass. But he had not lost sight of the lady and by the aid of a mirror he was a witness to another change which took place in her countenance. Now that she thought she was unobserved her features assumed an expression which almost amounted to that of ferocity.

She tore her handkerchief to pieces with her teeth.

The pretty waiting-maid whom D'Artagnan had noticed, then entered. She spoke a few words in English to Lord de Winter, who immediately begged D'Artagnan's permission to withdraw, excusing himself on account of

the urgency of the business that called him away and commissioning his sister to obtain his pardon.

D'Artagnan shook hands with Lord de Winter and returned to her ladyship. The countenance of this lady had, with a surprising power of change, resumed its pleasing expression, but some red stains upon her handkerchief proved that she had bitten her lips until they bled.

Those lips were magnificent; one would have thought them beautifully carved from scarlet coral.

The conversation now became animated. Her ladyship appeared entirely recovered. She explained that Lord de Winter was her brother-in-law and not her brother. She had married a younger son of the family and was left a widow, with a son. This child was the sole heir of Lord de Winter, if his lordship did not marry. All this discovered to D'Artagnan a veil which concealed something, but he could not yet distinguish anything beneath that veil.

After a half-hour's conversation D'Artagnan was quite convinced that her ladyship was his own countrywoman; she spoke French with a purity and elegance that left small room for doubt in that respect.

D'Artagnan uttered abundant gallantries and protestations of devotion, and at all these fooleries that escaped from him the lady smiled most sweetly. The hour for departure came at last, and D'Artagnan took leave of her ladyship and quitted her drawing-room the happiest of men.

On the staircase he met the pretty waiting-maid, who, having touched him gently in passing, blushed to the very eyes and begged his pardon in a voice so sweet that forgiveness was at once conferred.

D'Artagnan returned the next day and received a still more favorable reception. Lord de Winter was not present, and it was her ladyship herself on this occasion who did the honors of the evening. She seemed to take great interest in him, inquiring who he was and all about his friends, and whether he had not sometimes thought of attaching himself to the cardinal's service.

D'Artagnan, who, as we know, was very prudent for a youth of twenty, then remembered his suspicions concerning her ladyship. He uttered a fine eulogium on the cardinal, saying that he should not have failed to enter his eminence's guards had he first chanced to know M. de Cavois, instead of M. de Treville.

The lady changed the conversation without the slightest affectation, and with the utmost apparent indifference of manner asked him whether he had ever been in England.

He replied that he had once been sent over by M. de Treville to negotiate for a supply of horses and had even brought back four as a sample. In the course of this conversation her ladyship bit her lips three or four times; she had to deal with a youth who played a pretty close game.

D'Artagnan withdrew at the same hour as on the previous visit. In the corridor he again met pretty Kitty, for that was the Abigail's name. The latter looked at him with an expression of mysterious interest. But D'Artagnan was so engrossed by the mistress that he observed nothing that did not refer to her.

He returned to her ladyship's on the next day and the next again; and on each occasion was vouchsafed a more flattering welcome.

Every evening, too—either in the ante-chamber, in the corridor or on the staircase—he was sure to meet the pretty maid.

But as we have already said, D'Artagnan paid no attention to this strange perseverance on the part of poor Kitty.

CHAPTER XXXII.

AN ATTORNEY'S DINNER.

THE duel in which Porthos had played such a brilliant part had not made him forget the dinner to which he was invited by the attorney's wife. The next day

herefore, at about one o'clock, having received the last olish from Musqueton's brush, he proceeded to the Rue aux Ours.

His heart beat, but it was not, like that of D'Artagnan, vith a youthful and impatient sentiment; no, a more naterial influence conducted him: he was at last about o cross that mysterious threshold, to ascend that unknown staircase, up which the golden fees of Master Coquenard had mounted one by one. He was really about to see a certain strong-box of which he had so often beheld the image in his dream—a strong-box, long and deep in form; padlocked, barred and fastened to the floor; a strong-box of which he had so often heard and which the attorney's hands were now about to open before his admiring eyes.

And then he—the wanderer over the face of the earth —the man without fortune or family—the soldier, who frequented wine-shops, inns and taverns, and posadas— —the glutton, generally obliged to be contented with thance mouthfuls—was about to taste a family meal, o enjoy a comfortable home.

To go in his capacity of cousin and sit daily at a good table—to smooth the yellow wrinkled brow of the old ttorney—to pluck the young clerks a little by teaching them the greatest niceties of basset, hazard, and ansquenet, and by winning of them, by way of recompense for the lessons he should give them, in an hour, ll that they had saved within a month—all this accorded well with the singular manners of the times and prodigiously delighted Porthos.

And yet the musketeer remembered the many bad eports which were current concerning attorneys: their hrifts, their parings, and their fast days; but as, after ll, with the exception of some fits of economy, which Porthos had always found truly unseasonable, the ttorney's wife had been very liberal—that is, for an ttorney's wife, be it understood—he still hoped to meet with an establishment maintained upon a creditable scale.

At the door, however, he began to feel some doubt. Its appearance was not inviting: there was a dark and filthy passage and a badly lighted staircase, to which a grayish light penetrated through a grating from a neighboring courtyard. On the first floor he found a low door, studded with enormous nails, like the principal gate of the prison of the Grand Châtelet.

Porthos knocked with his knuckles, and a tall clerk, pale, and buried beneath a forest of hair, opened the door and bowed to him with the manner of a man who is compelled to respect in another the size which denotes strength, the military costume which denotes station, and the vermilion complexion which denotes a habit of living well.

There was another clerk, rather shorter, behind the first; another clerk, rather taller, behind the second, and a little stump-in-the-gutter, of twelve years old, behind the third.

In all there were three clerks and a half, which, considering the period, announced a highly prosperous business.

Although the soldier was not to arrive till one o'clock, yet the attorney's wife had been on the outlook since noon and reckoned on the heart, and perhaps on the stomach of her adorer, making him come a little before the appointed time.

Madame Coquenard, approaching by the door of the apartment, met her guest almost at the moment that he arrived by the staircase door, and the appearance of the worthy dame relieved Porthos from a great deal of embarrassment, for the clerks were looking on him with envious eyes; and he, hardly knowing what to say to this ascending and descending gamut, had remained entirely mute.

"It is my cousin," exclaimed the attorney's wife. "Come in, then, come in, M. Porthos."

The name of Porthos was not without its effect upon the clerks, who began to laugh; but Porthos turned, and all their countenances at once resumed their gravity.

They reached the sanctum of the attorney after having passed through an ante-chamber in which the clerks were, and an office in which they ought to have been. This latter was a dark room, well furnished with dusty papers. On leaving the office they passed the kitchen on the right hand and entered the drawing-room.

All these rooms, overlooking one another, did not produce in Porthos very pleasant ideas. Every word could be heard afar off through all these open doors; and then, in passing, he had cast a quick, investigating glance into the kitchen, and he confessed to himself, to the disgrace of his hostess and his own great regret, that he had not discovered that bustle, that animation, that activity, which, on the approach of an abundant meal, generally reigns throughout that sanctuary of gluttony.

The attorney had undoubtedly been informed of this anticipated visit, for he expressed no surprise at the sight of Porthos, who advanced toward him in an easy manner and saluted him politely.

"We are cousins, it seems, M. Porthos?" said the attorney, raising himself by means of his arms, from his cane-work easy-chair.

The old man, enveloped in a large black doublet, in which his shrivelled frame was lost, was yellow and weakly; his gray eyes glittered like carbuncles, and appeared, with his grinning mouth, to be the only part of his countenance in which life remained. Unfortunately, the legs had begun to refuse their services to this bony machine; and for the last five or six months, during which this weakness had been felt, the worthy attorney had almost become a slave to his wife.

The cousin was received with resignation, nothing more. With good legs Master Coquenard would have declined all relationship to M. Porthos.

"Yes, sir, we are cousins," replied Porthos, without being at all disconcerted; for, in fact, he had never calculated on being received by the husband with enthusiasm.

"Through the sex, I believe?" said the attorney, maliciously.

Porthos did not understand the sneer, but mistook it for simplicity and laughed at it beneath his thick mustache. Madame Coquenard, who knew that simplicity in an attorney would be a rare variety of the species, smiled a little and blushed a good deal.

Master Coquenard had, since Porthos's arrival, cast many a glance of uneasiness at a large press, placed opposite his own oaken escritoire. Porthos comprehended that this press, although it did not respond in form to that which he had seen in his dreams, must be the enchanting strong-box, and he congratulated himself on the fact that the reality was at least six feet taller than the dream.

Master Coquenard did not carry his genealogical investigation any further, but transferring an uneasy glance from the press to Porthos, he contented himself with saying:

"Your cousin will favor us with his company at dinner before he departs for the campaign, will he not, Madame Coquenard?"

This time Porthos received the blow full in the chest and felt it too; nor did Madame Coquenard appear entirely insensible to it, for she added:

"My cousin will not repeat his visit if he finds that we do not treat him well; but, on the other hand, he has too short a time to pass in Paris, and consequently to see us, for us not to beg of him almost all the moments that he can devote to us before his departure."

"Oh, my legs—my poor dear legs!" muttered M. Coquenard, with an attempt to smile.

This assistance, which had reached Porthos at the moment when his gastronomic hopes were assailed, inspired the musketeer with exceeding gratitude toward the attorney's wife.

The hour of dinner shortly sounded. They entered the dining-room, which was a large dark room, situated opposite the kitchen.

The clerks, who, as it seemed, had snuffed up some perfumes unusual in that house, came with military exactness and held their stools in their hands, in perfect readiness for sitting down. They might be seen moving their jaws beforehand with an ominous eagerness.

"Lord bless us!" thought Porthos, casting a look at these three famished beings—for the stump-in-the-gutter was not, as we may suppose, admitted to the honors of the master's table—"Lord bless us! In my cousin's place I would not keep such gormandizers. One would take them for shipwrecked people who had eaten nothing for six weeks."

M. Coquenard entered, pushed forward in his easy-chair by madame, when Porthos, in his turn, assisted in rolling her husband to the table.

Scarcely had he entered before he began to move his nose and jaws after the fashion of the clerks.

"Oh, oh!" said he, "here is soup which is quite alluring."

"What the plague do they smell so extraordinary in this soup?" thought Porthos, on beholding a tureen of abundant, but pale and thin broth, on the top of which a few straggling crusts floated, like islands in an archipelago.

Madame Coquenard smiled, and on a sign from her they all eagerly seated themselves.

M. Coquenard was served first and Porthos next. Madame Coquenard then filled her own plate and distributed the crusts, without soup, to the three impatient clerks.

At this moment the door of the dining-room opened with a creak and between the gaping panels Porthos could perceive the poor little clerk, who, unable to participate in the feast itself, was eating his dry bread betwixt the odor of the kitchen and the dining-room.

After the soup the servant girl brought in a boiled fowl—a profusion which expanded the eyelids of the revelers until they seemed almost about to melt entirely away.

"It is very perceptible that you love your family, Madame Coquenard," said the attorney, with a grin that was almost tragic; "this is indeed a compliment which you have paid your cousin."

The poor fowl was atrociously thin and covered with that bristling skin which the bones can never pierce in spite of their efforts. It must have been patiently sought for before it was detected on the perch to which it had withdrawn to die of old age.

"Faith!" thought Porthos, "this is but a melancholy prospect; I respect old age but I hardly relish it boiled or roasted."

He looked around to see if his own opinion was the general one, but, on the contrary, he saw nothing but glaring eyes, devouring by anticipation this venerable bird which he so much despised.

Madame Coquenard drew the dish toward her, adroitly detached the two great black paws, which she placed on her husband's plate; cut off the neck, which, together with the head, she laid aside for herself; took off a wing for Porthos, and then returned the bird, otherwise untouched, to the servant who had brought it in; so that it had completely disappeared before the musketeer had found time to note the changes which disappointment had wrought upon the various visages, according to the respective characters and dispositions of those who experienced it.

After the hen a dish of beans made its appearance—an enormous dish, in the midst of which sundry mutton-bones, which might at first sight have been supposed to be accompanied by some meat, displayed themselves.

But the clerks were not the dupes of this deception and their melancholy looks now settled into resignation.

Madame Coquenard, with the moderation of a thrifty housewife, distributed these viands amongst the young men.

The time for wine was come. M. Coquenard poured from a stone bottle of very slender proportions the third of a glass for each of the clerks, about an equal quantity

for himself, and then passed the bottle to the side of Porthos and madame.

The young men filled up their glasses with water; when they had drank half they again filled them up with water, and by repeating this process they had come, by the end of the feast, to swallow a beverage which had been transmuted from the deep tint of the ruby to the washy pink of a burnt topaz.

Porthos slowly masticated his fowl's wing and shuddered when, beneath the table, he felt madame's knee searching for his own. He also drank half a glass of this cherished wine, which he recognized as that horrible Montreuil, the terror of practised palates, whilst Master Coquenard sighed as he saw him swallow the wine undiluted.

"Will you eat any of these beans, Cousin Porthos?" inquired Madame Coquenard, in a tone which plainly said: "Take my word for it, you had better not."

"Thank you, cousin, I am no longer hungry," replied Porthos. There was a hideous pause. Porthos no longer knew how to demean himself, for the attorney kept repeating:

"Ah, Madame Coquenard, I compliment you kindly; your dinner was a positive feast. Lord! how I have eaten!"

Maître Coquenard had consumed his soup, the black paws of the fowl and the only mutton-bone that had on it any meat.

Porthos suspected that they were quizzing him and began to curl his mustache and knit his brow; but a look from Madame Coquenard recommended forbearance.

That silence and the pause in the feast, which to Porthos was unintelligible, had, on the other hand, a mournful significance to the clerks; on a glance from the attorney and a smile from the attorney's wife they slowly rose from the table, folded their napkins still more slowly, and then bowed and departed.

"Go, young men, go, and aid digestion by working," said the attorney, with great gravity.

The clerks being gone, Madame Coquenard arose and drew from a cupboard a morsel of cheese, some confection of quinces and a cake which she had herself manufactured with almonds and honey.

M. Coquenard frowned anew when he saw this more ample provision. Porthos pouched his lips because he saw nothing of which to make a dinner.

"A feast; decidedly a feast!" cried Maître Coquenard, moving uneasily in his chair. "'*Epulæ epularum*'—Lucullus dines with Lucullus."

Porthos looked at the bottle, which was near him, and hoped that, with wine, bread and cheese, he might yet make a dinner; but the wine was soon gone, the bottle being emptied, and neither Master nor Madame Coquenard seemed to observe it.

"Very well," said Porthos to himself, "here I am, out-generaled."

He passed his tongue over a small spoonful of the confection and stuck his teeth together in Madame Coquenard's glutinous cake.

"And now," thought he, "the sacrifice is consummated. Ah! if I were not sustained by the hope of looking with Madame Coquenard into her husband's treasury!"

After the delight of such a repast it was necessary for Master Coquenard to take his siesta. Porthos hoped that the affair would be managed in the very locality where he sat, but the attorney would hear of no such thing; it was necessary to conduct him to his own room, and he would not be easy till he was before his press, on the edges of which, as a greater precaution, he deposited his feet. The lady led Porthos into an adjoining room, where they proceeded to establish the conditions of their reconciliation.

"You may come and dine here three times a week," said Madame Coquenard.

"Thank you," said Porthos, "but I do not wish to abuse a good thing. Besides, I must think of my equipment."

"That's true," said the lady with a sigh, "there is that wretched equipment."

"Alas, yes!" said Porthos, "that's it."

"But of what does the equipment of your regiment consist, M. Porthos?"

"Oh, of a great many things," said Porthos; "the musketeers, as you know, are chosen troops, and they require many things unnecessary for the guards or Swiss."

"But yet you might give me some particulars of them."

"Why, they may amount to about——" commenced Porthos, who preferred the sum total to the detail.

The attorney's wife listened in trembling expectation.

"To how much?" said she, "I hope it will not exceed——" She stopped, for words failed her.

"Oh, no," said Porthos, "it will not exceed two thousand five hundred francs. I believe, indeed, that, by being economical I could manage with two thousand."

"Good heavens! two thousand francs!" exclaimed she. "Why, it is quite a fortune."

Porthos made a significant grimace which madame well understood.

"I asked the particulars," said she, "because, as I have many relations and connections in trade, I am sure to be able to get the things a hundred per cent. cheaper than you could buy them for yourself."

"Ah!" said Porthos, "is that what you meant?"

"Yes, dear M. Porthos. And so you will want first——"

"A horse."

"Yes, a horse. Well, I have got exactly the thing for you."

"Ah!" said Porthos, brightening up; "then that is arranged as regards my horse. I need, besides, a complete equipment for the horse, and that consists of articles which only a musketeer can purchase; they will cost more than three hundred francs."

"Three hundred francs? Well, call it three hundred francs," said the attorney's wife.

Porthos smiled. We may remember that he had the saddle sent by the Duke of Buckingham; he proposed putting three hundred francs slyly into his pocket.

"Then," he continued, "I shall need another horse for my servant and my baggage. As to arms, you need not trouble yourself—I have them."

"A horse for your servant?" resumed the attorney's wife, hesitating; "but that is really being almost too grand, my friend."

"Eh, madame!" said Porthos, haughtily; "do you happen to take me for a beggar?"

"Oh, no! I only mean to say that a handsome mule often looks as well as a horse, and that it seems to me by procuring a handsome mule for Musqueton——"

"Well, as to a handsome mule," said Porthos, "you are right; I have seen many great Spanish noblemen, all of whose followers were mounted upon mules. But then, you understand, Madame Coquenard, it must be a mule with plumes and bells."

"Rest quite easy on that score," said the lady.

"There only remains the portmanteau, then," added Porthos.

"Oh, do not let that disturb you," replied Madame Coquenard; "my husband has five or six portmanteaus and you shall choose the best. There is one in particular, which he used to prefer on his journeys and which is large enough to hold half the world."

"But is it empty, this portmanteau?" demanded Porthos.

"Yes, certainly, it is empty," replied the attorney's wife.

"Ah, but the portmanteau I want," exclaimed Porthos, "is a well furnished one, my dear."

Madame Coquenard breathed forth fresh sighs. Molière had not yet written his "Miser;" Madame Coquenard anticipated Harpagon.

At length the remainder of the equipment was haggled over in the same manner, and the result of the settling was that the attorney's wife should ask her husband for

a loan of eight hundred francs in hard cash and should furnish the horse and mule which were to have the honor of bearing Porthos and Musqueton upon their way to glory.

These conditions having been arranged and the interest and time of payment stipulated, Porthos took leave of Madame Coquenard and returned home, half famished and in a very bad humor.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

MAID AND MISTRESS.

NEVERTHELESS, as we have already said—in spite of the cries of conscience, in spite of the sage counsels of Athos and tender memories of Madame Bonancieux—D'Artagnan became each hour more deeply enamoured of her ladyship; nor did he ever fail to offer her a daily homage, to which the presumptuous Gascon was convinced that she must sooner or later respond.

As he arrived one evening, scenting the air like a man who was expecting a shower of gold, he met the waiting-maid at the carriage gate; but on this occasion the pretty Kitty was not contented with giving him a passing smile. She gently took his hand.

"Good!" thought D'Artagnan; "she is intrusted with some message for me from her mistress—an appointment for some meeting, which Milady wanted courage to announce herself," and he looked at the charming girl with the most insinuating look he could assume.

"I should be glad to say two words to you, sir," stammered the waiting-maid.

"Speak, child, speak!" said D'Artagnan. "I am listening."

"Not here, sir, it is impossible. What I have to tell you would take up too long a time and is, besides, a secret."

"Well, but what is to be done, then?"

"If you would please to follow me, sir," said Kitty, timidly.

"Wherever you please, my pretty child!"

"Then follow me."

By the hand which she had continued to hold, Kitty then led D'Artagnan to a small, dark, winding staircase; and after having made him ascend some fifteen steps, she opened a door.

"Enter, sir; we shall be alone and may converse here safely."

"And whose room is this, then, my pretty child?" inquired D'Artagnan.

"It is mine, sir; it communicates with that of my mistress through this door. But you may rely upon it that she will not hear what we may say, for she never goes to bed till midnight."

D'Artagnan threw a glance around him. The little room was a charming model of cleanliness and taste; but his eyes involuntarily turned toward the door which led, as Kitty had told him, to her ladyship's chamber.

Kitty guessed what was passing in the young man's mind and gave a sigh.

"Then you are very fond of my mistress, sir?" said she.

"Oh, more than I can tell, Kitty. I am mad with love of her!"

Kitty gave a second sigh.

"Alas! sir, it is a great pity!"

"And what the plague do you see to pity in it?"

"Because, sir, my mistress does not love you at all."

"What!" exclaimed D'Artagnan. "Did she desire you to tell me so?"

"Oh! no, sir, no! but from the interest that I take in you I have resolved to tell you."

"Thanks, my good Kitty, but only for the intention; for you must own that the information is not agreeable."

"That is to say, you do not believe what I have told you. Is that your meaning?"

"One is always unwilling to believe such things, my charming child, if it were only on account of self-love."

"Then you do not believe me?"

"I confess that until you condescend to give me some proof of what you assert——"

"What do you say to this?"

Kitty drew from her bosom a small note.

"For me?" exclaimed D'Artagnan, as he hastily seized the letter.

"No, for another."

"For another?"

"Yes."

"His name! his name!" cried D'Artagnan.

"Look at the address."

"'M. le Comte de Wardes.'"

The remembrance of the scene at St. Germain presented itself at once to the mind of the presumptuous Gascon. By a movement quick as thought he tore off the envelope, in spite of the cry which Kitty uttered when she saw what he was about to do, or rather, what he had already done.

"Oh, heavens! sir," said she, "what have you done?"

"I? Nothing," said D'Artagnan, and he read as follows:

"You have sent no answer to my first note. Are you, then, in too much suffering, or have you indeed forgotten the glances that you gave me at Madame de Guise's ball? Now is the opportunity, count; do not let it escape you."

D'Artagnan grew pale; he was wounded in his vanity, but he thought himself wounded in his love.

"Poor M. d'Artagnan!" said she, in a voice full of compassion, as she again pressed the young man's hand.

"You pity me, kind child," said D'Artagnan.

"Oh, yes, with all my heart, for I know well what love is myself."

"You know what love is?" said D'Artagnan, looking at her for the first time with particular attention.

"Alas! yes."

"Well, instead of pitying me, then, you would be doing better by assisting me to take revenge upon your mistress."

"And what kind of vengeance would you seek?"

"I would supplant my rival."

"I will not help you in that, sir," said Kitty, quickly.

"And why not?" inquired D'Artagnan.

"For two reasons."

"Which are?"

"The first—that my mistress will never love you."

"What can you know about it?"

"You have offended her too deeply."

"In what can I have offended her—I, who, since I have been acquainted with her, have lived at her feet like a very slave? Speak, I beseech you!"

"I will never avow that except to the man who can read the depths of my soul."

D'Artagnan looked at Kitty for the second time. There was about the young girl a freshness and a beauty which many a duchess would be glad to purchase with her coronet.

"Kitty," said he, "I will read even the very depths of your soul whenever you wish; so let not that restrain you, my dear child—speak!" And he gave her a kiss which made the poor child turn as red as a cherry.

"Oh, no!" exclaimed Kitty, "you do not love me; it is my mistress whom you love; you have this moment told me so."

"And does that prevent your making known your second reason?"

"The second reason," said Kitty, encouraged by the kiss and by the expression of the young man's eyes, "is, that in love we should all serve ourselves."

Then only D'Artagnan remembered the languishing glances, the smiles, and stifled sighs of Kitty whenever he chanced to meet her; whilst he, in his absorbing wish to please the titled lady, had neglected the Abigail. "He who chases the eagle takes no heed of the sparrow."

But our Gascon saw now, at a single glance, all the advantages which he might be able to derive from this passion which Kitty had so unexpectedly avowed—such as the interception of letters to the Count de Wardes, intelligence of everything that occurred and an entrance at any hour to that chamber which was contiguous to her ladyship's room. In idea, at least, he was already sacrificing the poor young maiden for the possession of her noble mistress.

"Very well," he said to the young girl; "do you want me to give you, my dear Kitty, a proof of that love which you doubt?"

"Of what love?" she asked.

"Of that which I am now ready to feel for you."

"What proof do you mean?"

"Do you wish me this evening to spend with you the time that I spend usually with your mistress?"

"Oh, yes!" said Kitty, clapping her hands; "I do wish it heartily."

"Well, my dear child," said D'Artagnan, establishing himself in an easy-chair, "come here while I tell you that you are the prettiest girl I have ever seen."

He said it to her so often and with such an expression, that the poor child, who wanted so much to believe him, believed him. And yet, to D'Artagnan's great surprise, the pretty Kitty defended herself with considerable resolution.

Time passes rapidly when it is spent in attack and defence.

Midnight at length sounded and almost at the same instant a bell was heard from an adjoining chamber.

"Good heavens!" exclaimed Kitty, "there is my mistress ringing for me; go now, go directly!"

D'Artagnan arose and took his hat as though he intended to obey, then opening quickly the door of a large press, instead of that of the staircase, he squeezed himself within, amidst the robes and night-clothes of her ladyship.

"What are you about?" exclaimed Kitty.

D'Artagnan, who had secured the key beforehand, fastened himself in his press without reply.

"Well!" exclaimed Milady, in a sharp voice, "are you asleep, then, that you do not come when I ring?"

D'Artagnan heard the door of communication opened violently.

"Here I am, Milady, here I am!" exclaimed Kitty, springing forward, that she might meet her mistress.

They returned together to the bed-chamber, and as the door continued open, D'Artagnan could hear her ladyship complaining for a time. At last, however, she became appeased; and as Kitty waited on her mistress their conversation turned upon the listener.

"Well," said Milady, "I have not seen our Gascon here this evening."

"What, madame," said Kitty, "has he not been? Can he have proved fickle before he has been favored?"

"Oh, no! he must have been hindered either by M. de Treville or M. des Essarts. I have some experience, Kitty, and I hold that man securely."

"What will your ladyship do with him?"

"What shall I do with him? Depend upon it, Kitty, there is something between that man and me of which he little thinks. He very nearly destroyed my credit with his eminence Oh! I will have vengeance!"

"I thought that your ladyship loved him?"

"Love him! I detest him. The ninny held Lord de Winter's life in his power and did not kill him, and by that alone he made me lose an income of three hundred thousand francs."

"It is true," said Kitty, "your son was the sole heir of his uncle, and till he became of age you would have had the advantage of the fortune."

D'Artagnan shuddered to the very marrow of his bones at hearing this sweet creature censuring him in that voice whose sharpness she had so much trouble to conceal in conversation, for not having slain a man on whom he had seen her heaping indications of affection.

"Yes," continued her ladyship, "and I would have taken vengeance on him before now, if, for some reason or

other that I know not, the cardinal had not insisted on forbearance."

"Oh, yes; but your ladyship had no forbearance with that little woman that he loved."

"What! the mercer's wife of the Rue des Fossoyeurs! Why, has he not already forgotten her existence? A fine vengeance that was, truly."

Cold drops trickled on the brow of D'Artagnan; this titled lady was a very monster.

He set himself again to listen, but the toilet was, unfortunately, ended.

"That will do," said her ladyship; "go to your own room now and try to-morrow to get me an answer at last to that letter which I have given you"

"For M. de Wardes?"

"Certainly, for M. de Wardes."

"Ah!" said Kitty, "he is one that seems to me in a very different frame of mind that from poor M. d'Artagnan."

"Leave me, girl!" exclaimed her ladyship; "I do not like remarks."

D'Artagnan heard the noise of the closing door and then of two bolts with which Milady secured herself within. Kitty, on her side, turned the key in the lock as gently as it was possible. D'Artagnan then pushed open the door of the press.

"Oh, my God!" whispered Kitty, "what ails you? What makes you look so pale?"

"The abominable wretch!" muttered D'Artagnan.

"Silence! silence! Go away," said Kitty; "there is only a partition between my room and Milady's, and everything that is said in one is heard in the other."

"For precisely that reason I will not go," said D'Artagnan.

"What do you mean?" said Kitty, blushing.

"Or, rather, I will go—later;" and he drew Kitty to him. There was no possibility of resistance, it would have made so much noise! So Kitty did not resist.

It was a sort of vengeance on Milady, and D'Artagnan

found that they are right who say that vengeance is a pleasure for the gods. So, had he been a man of heart he would have been pleased with this new conquest but D'Artagnan was ruled by pride and ambition.

However, it must be said to D'Artagnan's credit that the first use he made of his influence over Kitty was to try to learn from her what had become of Madame Bonancieux; but the poor girl swore to D'Artagnan upon the crucifix that she was completely ignorant regarding the matter, as her mistress never allowed her to know more than half of any of her secrets. But she thought he might rely upon it that she was not dead.

Nor did Kitty really know anything further about the circumstance which had nearly made her mistress lose her credit with the cardinal. But in this particular D'Artagnan was better informed. As he had perceived her ladyship on shipboard at the very moment that he was quitting England, he did not doubt that it had some reference to the diamond studs.

But what was most manifest in the whole affair was the genuine, deep, inveterate hatred which her ladyship entertained against him for not having killed her brother-in-law.

D'Artagnan returned to her ladyship's on the next day. He found her in a very ill-humor and he understood that it was the disappointment of an answer from De Wardes which thus provoked her. Kitty entered but Milady treated her harshly. A glance which she gave at D'Artagnan seemed to say,—"See what I suffer upon your account."

But as the evening wore on the lovely lioness grew gentle. She listened with a smile to the tender compliments of D'Artagnan and condescended even to give him her hand to kiss.

D'Artagnan left her, scarcely knowing what to think. But as he was a Gascon, who was not easily to be deceived, he had in his mind contrived a little plan.

He found Kitty at the door and went, as on the evening before, to her room, to collect intelligence. Kitty

had been sadly scolded and accused of negligence. Her ladyship could not comprehend the silence of the Count de Wardes and had commanded her maid to come to her at nine o'clock the next morning for a third letter.

D'Artagnan made Kitty promise to come to him in the morning and bring that letter to him. The girl promised all that D'Artagnan desired; she was crazed.

Everything passed as on the preceding night.

D'Artagnan concealed himself. Milady called, disrobed, sent Kitty away and closed the door. As on the preceding night D'Artagnan did not depart till five in the morning.

At eleven o'clock he saw Kitty make her appearance. She held in her hand another note from her ladyship. On this occasion the poor girl did not even endeavor to detain it from D'Artagnan; she let him do as he chose; in body and in soul she belonged to her handsome soldier.

D'Artagnan opened this second note, which, like the other, bore neither signature nor address, and read as follows:

"This is the third time I have written to tell you I love you; take care that I do not write a fourth time, to tell you that I hate you. If you are sorry for the way you have treated me the young girl who brings this letter will tell you how a gallant man may obtain forgiveness."

D'Artagnan's color changed several times as he perused this note.

"Oh, you love her still!" said Kitty, whose eyes had never once been turned away from the young man's face.

"No, Kitty, you deceive yourself. I no longer love her, but I want to avenge myself for her contempt."

"Yes, I know your vengeance! You told me."

"What does it matter, Kitty? You know I love you only."

"How can I be sure of that?"

" By the disdain I will cast upon her."

Kitty sighed.

D'Artagnan took up a pen, and wrote :

" MADAME,—Until now I have been in doubt whether your former notes could really have been meant for me, so unworthy did I feel myself of such an honor ; but to-day I must at least believe in the excess of your kindness, since not only your letter, but your servant, also, affirm that I have the happiness to be the object of your love.

" She has no need to tell me how a gallant man may obtain forgiveness. At eleven to-night I shall come to implore your forgiveness. To delay another day, at present, would be, in my opinion, to offer you a new affront.

" He whom you have rendered the happiest of men."

This note was not precisely a forgery, as D'Artagnan did not sign it, but it was an indelicacy ; it was even, according to the standard of our present manners, something like an act of infamy ; but people in those days were less scrupulous than we are now. Moreover, D'Artagnan knew, from her ladyship's own avowal, that she had been guilty of treacheries in the most important affairs and his respect for her was singularly small. And yet, little as he respected her, he felt an ungovernable passion for the woman. Passion drunk with contempt ; but passion or thirst, as one chooses to call it.

D'Artagnan's plot was very simple. Through Kitty's chamber he would enter that of her mistress. He would profit by the first moment of surprise, of shame, of terror, to triumph over her. Perhaps he might not succeed, but he must leave it to chance. In eight days the campaign would open and he must leave then. D'Artagnan had no time to procrastinate.

" There," said the young man, handing the sealed note to Kitty, " give this letter to her ladyship ; it is M. de Wardes's reply."

Poor Kitty became as white as a lily; she suspected what the note contained.

"Listen, my dear child," said D'Artagnan; "you understand that all this must come to an end in one way or another. Your mistress may discover that you delivered the first note to my servant, instead of to the count's; and that it was I who unsealed the others, which should have been opened by M. de Wardes. Her ladyship will then dismiss you, and you know that she is not the kind of woman to be moderate in her revenge."

"Alas!" said Kitty, "why have I exposed myself to this?"

"For me, I know, my beauty," said the young man, "and very grateful am I for it, I swear."

"But what does your note contain?"

"Her ladyship will tell you."

"Alas! you do not love me!" exclaimed Kitty, "and I am very wretched!"

To this reproach there is always an answer to delude a woman. D'Artagnan answered in a way that kept Kitty in error.

Kitty wept much before she determined to deliver this letter to her mistress; but, from devotion to the young soldier, she did determine at last, and that was all that D'Artagnan desired.

At last he promised to leave her mistress early in the evening and come to her.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

CONCERNING THE EQUIPMENTS OF ARAMIS AND PORTHOS.

WHILST the four friends were busily engaged in looking out for their equipments there had no longer been any regular meetings among them. They dined, without one another, wherever they chanced to be, and met together when they could. Duty also, on its side, occupied a

part of that precious time which was so rapidly passing away. But they had agreed to meet once a week about one o'clock at Athos's chambers, as it was known that he, according to his vow, would never pass over the threshold of his door.

The very day on which Kitty had visited D'Artagnan at his own home was one of their days of meeting; and scarcely had the waiting-maid quitted D'Artagnan before he proceeded to the Rue Ferou.

He found Athos and Aramis philosophizing. Aramis had still a secret inclination to return to the cassock, and Athos, according to his custom, neither dissuaded nor encouraged him. Athos liked every one to exercise his own free will.

He never gave his advice before it was asked for, and, even then, it must be asked for twice.

"In general, people only ask for advice," he said, "that they may not follow it; or, if they should follow it, that they may have somebody to blame for having given it."

Porthos arrived an instant after D'Artagnan, so the four friends were all assembled.

Their four countenances had four different expressions that of Porthos, tranquillity; of D'Artagnan, hope; of Aramis, anxiety; and that of Athos, utter indifference.

After a moment's conversation, in which Porthos obscurely intimated that a lady high in rank had kindly taken upon herself to relieve him from his embarrassment Musqueton entered.

He came to request Porthos to come to his lodging where, said he, in a most melancholy tone, his presence was most urgently required.

"Are my equipments come?" demanded Porthos.

"Yes and no," replied Musqueton.

"But what do you mean, I ask you?"

"Come, sir!"

Porthos arose, bowed to his friends and followed Musqueton.

A moment afterwards Bazin appeared on the door-sill.

"What do you want, my friend?" inquired Aramis, with that softness of tone which was always observable in him when his ideas inclined toward the church.

"A man is awaiting you, sir, at your rooms," replied Bazin.

"A man? What sort of a man?"

"A beggar."

"Give him something, Bazin, and tell him to pray for a poor sinner."

"This beggarman insists on seeing you and wishes to make out that you will be very glad to see *him*."

"Has he got anything particular for me?"

"Yes. 'If M. Aramis hesitates to come to me,' said he, 'tell him I have just arrived from Tours.'"

"From Tours! I will go directly!" exclaimed Aramis. "Gentlemen, a thousand pardons; but undoubtedly this man brings me the news I was expecting." And getting up at once, he went off at a run.

There now remained only Athos and D'Artagnan.

"I verily believe that those fellows have settled their affairs," said Athos. "What think you about it, D'Artagnan?"

"I knew that Porthos was in a fair way, and as for Aramis, to tell the truth, I was never very uneasy about him. But you, my dear Athos, who so generously gave away the English pistoles which were your legitimate property—what will you do?"

"I am very glad that I killed the rascal," said Athos. "seeing that he had the silly curiosity to know my real name; but if I had pocketed his pistoles they would have weighted me down with remorse."

"Well, my dear Athos, you really have an inconceivable delicacy," said D'Artagnan.

"Enough! enough! But what was M. de Treville saying when he did me the honor to call and see me yesterday—that you haunt these suspicious English people whom the cardinal protects?"

"That is to say, that I visit an Englishwoman—the lady of whom I told you."

"Ah, yes, the fair woman about whom I gave you some advice, which naturally enough you took especial care not to follow."

"I gave you my reasons. But I am now certain that Milady had something to do with the disappearance of Madame Bonancieux."

"Yes, I comprehend—to find one woman, you make love to another. It is the longest way, but by far the most amusing."

D'Artagnan was about to unbosom himself to Athos, but one reason restrained him. Athos was a gentleman scrupulous on points of honor, and in the plan he had made for Milady he was sure he could not obtain Athos's assent. He was therefore silent.

We will now leave the two friends, who had nothing very important to say to one another, and follow Aramis.

On entering his room he found a little man with intelligent eyes, but dressed in rags.

"Is it you who want to see me?"

"I am in search of M. Aramis; is that the name by which you are called?"

"Yes. Have you anything for me?"

"Yes, if you can show me a certain embroidered handkerchief."

"Here it is," said Aramis, taking a key from his bosom and opening a small ebony casket, inlaid with mother-of-pearl. "Here it is. Look!"

"That is right," said the beggar; "now dismiss your servant."

For, in fact, Bazin, curious to know what the beggar wanted with his master, had kept pace with him and arrived almost at the same time. But his speed was of little benefit to him. At the suggestion of the beggar his master made a sign to him to withdraw, and he had no alternative but to obey.

When Bazin was gone the beggar glanced rapidly around to be sure that nobody could either see or hear him, and then, opening his ragged vest, which was intermittently held together by a leathern belt, he began

rip the top of his doublet, from which he drew a tter.

Aramis uttered a cry of joy at the sight of the seal, issed the writing and, with a respect almost religious, pened the letter which contained what follows :

" My Friend,—Fate wills that we be separated for a ttle longer time, but the bright days of youth are not prever lost. Do your duty in the camp ; I will do mine sewhere. Take what the bearer will give you ; make ie campaign like a good and graceful gentleman, and ways remember me, who kiss tenderly your black eyes.

" Farewell, until we meet again."

The beggar was yet engaged in ripping ; he drew from is dirty clothes, one by one, a hundred and fifty double panish pistoles, which he placed in a row upon the ible ; then he opened the door, bowed, and was gone efore the astonished young man had dared to address word to him.

Aramis now reperused the letter and perceived that had the following postscript :

" P.S.—You can be hospitable to the bearer, who is a unt and a grandee of Spain."

" Golden dreams ! " exclaimed Aramis ; " oh ! hea- nly life ! yes, we are still young ! yes, we shall still ask in brighter days ! Oh ! thou art my love, my fe-blood, my being ! All in all art thou, my beautiful eloved ! "

And he kissed the letter passionately, without even ancing at the gold which glittered on the table.

Bazin was scratching at the door, and, as Aramis had ow no reason for keeping him away, he permitted him come in.

He was astounded at the sight of so much gold and rgot that he should have announced D'Artagnan, who, rious to know what this beggarman was, had come on Aramis when he left Athos.

But D'Artagnan never stood on ceremony with Arami and therefore, seeing that Bazin had forgotten to a nounce him, he announced himself.

"Ah, the deuce! my dear Aramis," said he on ente ing, "these are the plums they send you from Tours you must send my congratulations on them to the ga dener who gathers them."

"You are mistaken, my dear fellow," said the ev discreet Aramis; "it is my bookseller, who has just se me the price of my poem, in verses of one syllable, whic I began down in the country."

"Ah! really?" said D'Artagnan. "Well, all I ca say, my dear Aramis, is, that your bookseller is ve generous."

"What, sir," said Bazin, "does a poem sell for suc a sum? It is inconceivable! Oh, sir, you must c whatever you desire; you may become equal to M Voiture and M. de Benserade. I like that now, mysel A poet! It is next door to an abbé. Ah, sir, establis yourself, then, as a poet, I beseech you!"

"Bazin, my friend," said Aramis, "I think that yo are interposing in the conversation."

The valet understood that he was wrong, bowed h head and left the room.

"Ah!" said D'Artagnan, with a smile, "you sell yo productions for their weight in gold! You are fo tunate, my friend! But take care or you will lose th letter which is falling out of your coat and which, wit out doubt, is also from your bookseller."

Aramis blushed to the very white of his eyes, thru in the letter and buttoned up his doublet.

"My dear D'Artagnan," said he, "we will, if yo please, go to our friends; and, as I am now so rich, w will begin to dine together again, till you become, turn, rich yourselves."

"Faith, and with great pleasure," replied D'Artagna "It is a long time since we have had a suitable dinne and as I have myself rather a hazardous expedition th evening, I shall not be sorry, I confess, to have t

mes of two or three bottles of old Burgundy mounting
into my head."

"Well, as for old Burgundy, I do not hate it myself,
ther," said Aramis, out of whose head the sight of the
ld had driven all thoughts of retirement.

And having put three or four double pistoles into his
cket for present use, he inclosed the remainder in the
ony casket, incrusted with pearl, which already con-
ined the famous handkerchief that had served him in
u of talisman.

The two friends went first to Athos, who, faithful to
s vow not to go from home, undertook to have the
nner brought to his own rooms. As he was marvel-
sly familiar with all gastronomical details, D'Artagnan
d Aramis had no scruples in confiding to him this
portant matter.

They then went to Porthos, but at the corner of the
ue du Bac they met Musqueton, who, with a most
teous face, was driving a mule and a horse before him.

D'Artagnan uttered an exclamation of surprise, not
mingled with joy.

"Ah! my yellow horse!" cried he. "Aramis, behold
is horse!"

"Oh, what a frightful beast!" exclaimed Aramis.

"Well, my dear boy, it is the horse on which I came
Paris."

"What, sir, do you know the animal?" inquired
usqueton.

"He certainly is of a most original color," said Aramis.
I never saw one with such a hide before."

"I can well believe it," replied D'Artagnan; "and
sold him for three crowns, which must have been for
s hide, for certainly the carcass is not worth eighteen
res. But how do I find this horse in your hands?"

"Ah!" said the valet, "do not say anything about
sir. It is a horrible trick of our duchess's husband."

"How so?"

"Yes, we are looked upon most favorably by a woman
quality, the Duchess of —— But, excuse me, my

master has enjoined me to be discreet. She obliged u to accept a small memorial, a magnificent Spanis charger and an Andalusian mule, which were mo marvelous to behold. But the husband found it ou abstracted on their way the two magnificent anima and substituted these frightful beasts for them."

"And are you taking them back to him?"

"Yes, that is it, exactly, sir," replied Musqueto "You know it is impossible for us to accept such scar crows as these, instead of those which had been pron ised us."

"No, egad! though I should have enjoyed seei Porthos on my yellow horse. It would have given m some idea of what I looked like myself when I came Paris. But do not let us detain you. Musqueton. G and execute your master's commission! Go! Is he home?"

"Yes, sir," said Musqueton, "but in a very ba humor."

He then continued on his way toward the quay of t Grande Augustins, whilst the two friends went to ri at the unfortunate Porthos's door. But the latter ha seen them crossing the court and was careful not to l them in. So their ringing was in vain.

In the meantime Musqueton proceeded on, and crossi the Pont Neuf, still driving the two sorry beasts befo him, he reached the Rue aux Ours, where, in accordan with his master's orders, he fastened the horse and t mule to the knocker of the attorney's door; and the without disturbing himself about their future fate, returned to find Porthos and inform him that his co mission had been punctually executed.

After some time the two unhappy beasts, having eat nothing since the morning, made so great a noise lifting up and letting fall the knocker, that the attorn ordered his stump-in-the-gutter to inquire in the neig borhood to whom this horse and mule belonged.

Madame Coquenard recognized her present and cou not, at first, at all comprehend such a restitution. B

visit from Porthos soon enlightened her. The rage which, in spite of the constraint that he imposed upon himself, sparkled in the musketeer's eyes, alarmed his susceptible admirer. In fact, Musqueton had not concealed from his master that he had met D'Artagnan and Aramis, and that the former had recognized in the yellow horse the very Béarnese nag on which he had arrived at Paris and which he had sold for three crowns.

Porthos left again as soon as he had made an appointment to meet the attorney's wife in the Cloister of St. Magloire. When her husband saw that Porthos was leaving he invited him to dinner—an invitation which the musketeer declined with an air of majestic dignity.

Madame Coquenard trembled as she went toward the cloister of St. Magloire, for she anticipated the reproaches that awaited her. But she was fascinated by the lofty manners of Porthos.

All the imprecations and reproaches that a man, whose vanity is wounded, can pour upon a woman, were poured by Porthos on the humble head of the attorney's wife.

"Alas!" said she, "I did it all for the best. One of our clients is a horse-dealer; he owed us money and was manifestly reluctant to pay, so I took this mule and horse in discharge of his debt; but he had promised me two royal animals."

"Well, madame," said Porthos, "if his debt was more than five crowns your horse-dealer is a thief."

"It is not forbidden one to look out for a good bargain, M. Porthos," said the attorney's wife, by way of excuse.

"No, madame, but those who look out for good bargains ought to permit others to look out for more generous friends."

And turning on his heel, Porthos made a step toward retiring.

"M. Porthos! M. Porthos!" exclaimed the attorney's wife, "I confess that it was wrong; I ought not to have thought of bargaining about the equipment of a gentleman like you."

Without replying, Porthos took a second step to leave.

The attorney's wife fancied that she saw him in glittering sphere, encompassed by duchesses and ma chionesses, who scattered bags of gold before his feet.

"Stay! in Heaven's name, stay, M. Porthos!" e claimed she; "stay and let us talk it all over."

"To talk with you brings me ill-luck," said Porthos.

"But tell me, what do you require?"

"Nothing; for that amounts to the same thing though I required something of you."

The attorney's wife hung on Porthos's arm and in t violence of her grief exclaimed:

"M. Porthos, I am completely ignorant about all the things. What can I know about a horse? What do know about equipments?"

"You should leave it to me, then, who do understar them, madame. But you wanted to get things chea that you might lend at usury."

"It was wrong, M. Porthos, and I will give you repar tion, on my word of honor."

"And how so?" demanded the musketeer.

"Listen. M. Coquenard is going this evening to t Duke de Chaulnes, who has sent for him. It is to consultation which will last at least two hours. Com then; we shall be alone, and arrange the business."

"Well, that is much more to the point."

"And you will forgive me?"

"We shall see," replied Porthos majestically.

They parted from each other, repeating: "Till th evening!"

"I' faith!" thought Porthos, as he went his way, " seem now to be creeping a step or two nearer M. Coqu nard's strong-box."

CHAPTER XXXV.

ALL CATS ARE THE SAME COLOR IN THE DARK.

THE evening so impatiently awaited by D'Artagnan length arrived.

At about nine o'clock he went, as usual, to her ladyship's, and as he found her in a wonderfully good humor he was received more sweetly than ever. Our Gascon saw at the first glance that the pretended note of the Count de Wardes had been delivered by Kitty to her mistress and that it was producing its effect.

Kitty came in with some sherbets. Her mistress looked at her kindly and smiled on her with her most gracious smile; but the poor girl was so concerned at the presence of D'Artagnan with her ladyship that she was insensible to the latter's good-will.

D'Artagnan looked by turns at these two women and could not but confess that nature had committed a mistake in molding them; to the great lady she had given a venial and perfidious soul, and to the waiting-maid a loving and devoted heart.

At ten o'clock her ladyship began to appear uneasy and D'Artagnan soon guessed the meaning of her trouble. She looked at the time-piece, got up, sat down again, and smiled at D'Artagnan, with a look which seemed to say, "You are very amiable, no doubt, but you would be still more charming if you would but go."

D'Artagnan arose and took his hat and then her ladyship gave him her hand to kiss. The young man was sensible of a gentle pressure, which he attributed, not to coquetry, but to gratitude on account of his departure.

"She loves him madly!" muttered he, as he went out.

On this occasion Kitty was not awaiting him, either in the ante-chamber, in the corridor, or at the gate; and D'Artagnan had to find out, alone, the staircase and the little chamber.

Kitty was sitting with her face between her hands, crying. She heard D'Artagnan enter, but did not lift up her head. The young man went to her and took her hands, and then she burst out in sobs.

As D'Artagnan had suspected, her ladyship, on receiving the letter which she regarded as the Count de Wardes's reply, had, in the delirium of her joy, made

her waiting-maid acquainted with the whole, and then as a recompense for the manner in which her mission had been executed, had given her a purse of gold.

Kitty, on returning to her room, had thrown the purse into a corner, where it was lying open, disgorging three or four golden coins upon the carpet.

When at last the poor girl, at D'Artagnan's entreaty, raised her head, he was struck with alarm at the expression of her face. She clasped her hands together with a suppliant air, but without venturing to speak a word.

Little sensible as was D'Artagnan's heart, he was yet affected by this silent grief. But he was too positive in all his projects, and especially in this one, to deviate at all from his ordained arrangement. He would not give Kitty the least hope of deferring the rash enterprise on which he had resolved; but he represented it to her as what it really was—that is, as an act of simple vengeance against her ladyship's coquetry; and as the only means which he possessed of obtaining, from her dread of the scandal of exposure, the information that he wanted in respect to Madame Bonancieux.

This plan became also the more easy in its execution from her ladyship having, doubtless to hide her blushes from her lover, commanded Kitty to extinguish all the lights in her apartment. M. de Wardes would depart before day, while it was yet dark.

An instant afterward her ladyship was heard returning to her chamber. D'Artagnan immediately hurried within his press. Scarcely was he blockaded in it before the bell rung.

Kitty went to her mistress and did not leave the door open; but the partition was so thin that the conversation of the two women was almost wholly audible.

Her ladyship seemed to be intoxicated with joy. She made Kitty repeat to her the most trifling details of her pretended interview with De Wardes and tell her how he had received her letter and how he answered it, what was the expression of his face and whether he

seemed much enamored; and to all those questions poor Kitty, who was compelled to keep up the comedy, answered in a stifled voice, of which her mistress, so egotistical is happiness, did not even observe the disconsolate tone.

As the hour of her interview with the count approached, her ladyship had all the lights in her room actually extinguished and commanded Kitty to return to her chamber and to introduce De Wardes as soon as he arrived.

Kitty had not long to wait. Hardly had D'Artagnan seen, through the keyhole of his press, that the whole apartment was in darkness, before he sprang from his cupboard, at the very moment that Kitty closed the communicating door.

"What is that noise?" inquired Milady.

"It is I," whispered D'Artagnan, "I, the Count de Wardes."

"Oh, my God! my God!" groaned Kitty, "he could not even wait for the hour himself had fixed."

"Well!" said the lady, in a trembling voice, "why does he not come in? Count, count," added she, "you know that I am waiting for you."

At this appeal D'Artagnan put Kitty gently aside and sprang into her ladyship's room.

What rage and grief must torture the soul of the lover who receives, under a name that is not his own, protestations of affection which address themselves to his favored rival!

D'Artagnan was in a situation of which he had not calculated the suffering; jealousy was gnawing at his heart, and he had to endure almost as much as poor Kitty, who was at that very time weeping in the adjoining chamber.

"Yes, count," said her ladyship, in her sweetest tones, as she tenderly pressed one of his hands between her own; "yes, I am happy in the love which your looks and words expressed whenever we have met. And I, too, return your love. Ah! to-morrow you must let

me have some keepsake which will prove you think of me ; and, as you might forget me, count, keep this."

And she slipped a ring from her own finger on to that of D'Artagnan.

It was a magnificent sapphire, encircled by diamonds.

The first emotion of D'Artagnan prompted him to return it, but her ladyship added :

" No, no ! keep this ring for love of me. Besides," added she, in a voice of much emotion, " you really do me a far greater service by accepting it than you can possibly imagine."

" This woman is full of mystery," thought D'Artagnan.

He felt himself at this moment ready to confess everything. He had, in fact, already opened his mouth to tell her ladyship who he was and with what desire of vengeance he had come, when she added :

" Poor angel ! whom that monster of a Gascon almost killed."

The monster was himself.

" Oh ! " continued her ladyship, " do you still suffer from your wounds ? "

" Yes, greatly," answered D'Artagnan, who was somewhat at a loss what to say.

" Depend upon it," muttered her ladyship, in a tone which gave but little comfort to her hearer, " that I will take a terrible vengeance on him for your sufferings."

" Egad ! " said D'Artagnan to himself, " the time for my confession is not come yet."

It required some little time for D'Artagnan to recover himself from this little dialogue. All the ideas of vengeance which he had brought with him had completely vanished. The woman exercised an inconceivable power over him—he hated and adored her at the same time. Never had he believed that two sentiments so inconsistent could exist together in the same heart, creating, by commingling, a strange and, in some respects, a diabolical love.

But the clock had struck one and it was time for them to separate. At the moment of quitting her ladyship

D'Artagnan was only sensible of a deep regret at being parted from her; and in the passionate adieu which they reciprocally addressed to one another a new meeting was agreed upon in the ensuing week.

Poor Kitty hoped to have an opportunity of saying a few words to D'Artagnan as he passed through her chamber, but her mistress led him out herself in the darkness and only left him when they reached the staircase.

In the morning of the next day D'Artagnan hastened to Athos; for, being engaged in such a singular adventure, he wished for his advice. He told him everything and Athos's brow was often knitted during the narration.

"Your lady," said he, "appears to me to be an infamous creature; but you are not, on that account, the less wrong in thus deceiving her. You may now be sure that, in one way or another, you will have a bitter enemy to deal with."

Whilst still speaking Athos looked earnestly at the sapphire, encircled with diamonds, which D'Artagnan now wore in the place of the queen's ring, which was carefully deposited in a case.

"You are looking at this ring?" said the Gascon, proud of displaying before his friend such a splendid gift.

"Yes," replied Athos; "it reminds me of a family jewel."

"It is beautiful, is it not?" said D'Artagnan.

"Magnificent!" rejoined Athos. "I did not believe that there were two sapphires in the world of so fine a water. Did you exchange your diamond for it?"

"No," replied D'Artagnan; "it is a present from my beautiful Englishwoman, or, rather, my beautiful Frenchwoman, for, although I have not asked her, I am sure she was born in France."

"And this ring was given to you by her ladyship?" said Athos, in a voice in which it was easy to perceive extreme emotion.

"Yes, by herself; she gave it to me last night."

"Let me look at it," said Athos.

"Here it is," said D'Artagnan, drawing it from his finger. Athos examined it and became very pale; he then tried it on the ring-finger of his left hand, and it fitted as if it had been made for him.

A shade of anger and revenge passed across his generally calm forehead.

"It is impossible that it can be the same," said he. "How could this ring come into the hands of that lady? And yet it is very strange that two jewels should be so wondrously alike."

"Do you know the ring?" asked D'Artagnan.

"I thought I recognized it," said Athos, "but I dare say I am mistaken."

He then returned the ring to D'Artagnan, without, however, ceasing to keep his eyes upon it.

"Let me entreat you," said he, an instant afterward, "either to take that ring from your finger or to turn the stone inside; it recalls to me such painful remembrances that I should not be collected enough for any conversation. Did you not come to ask my advice? Did you not say that you were in a difficulty what to do? But stop, let me look at that sapphire again. The one I mentioned had one of its surfaces scratched by an accident."

D'Artagnan again drew off the ring and handed it to Athos.

Athos trembled.

"Look," said he, "look. Is it not strange?" And he pointed out to D'Artagnan the scratch that he remembered should be there.

"But whence came this sapphire, Athos?"

"It was my mother's, who had received it from her mother. As I told you, it is an ancient jewel, which ought never to have left the family."

"And you—sold it?" demanded D'Artagnan, with some hesitation.

"No," replied Athos, with a singular smile, "I gave it away during a moment of love, as it was given to you."

D'Artagnan grew pensive in his turn. He thought

that he could discern in her ladyship's life abysses that seemed more dark and terrible than ever.

He put the ring, not on his finger, but into his pocket.

"Listen," said Athos, taking the young man's hand. "You know how much I love you, D'Artagnan. Had I a son I could not love him more dearly. Well, take my advice—renounce this woman. I do not know her, but a kind of intuition tells me that she is a lost creature and that there is something deadly in her."

"You are right," said D'Artagnan, "and I *will* renounce her. I will confess that this woman frightens even me."

"And will you have the resolution?" asked Athos.

"Yes, and at once, too," replied D'Artagnan.

"You are quite right, my dear D'Artagnan," said Athos, pressing his hand with an affection almost paternal; "and God grant that this woman, who has scarcely been a part of your existence, may leave no pestilential trace upon it!"

And Athos bowed his head, like a man who would not be sorry to be left to his own thoughts.

On reaching home D'Artagnan found Kitty awaiting him. A month of fever could not have made a greater change in the poor girl than had been produced by an hour of jealousy and grief.

She had been sent by her mistress to the Count de Wardes. Her mistress was mad with love—intoxicated with joy; she wanted to know when the count would accord her a second interview.

The pale and trembling Kitty waited there for D'Artagnan's reply.

Athos had considerable influence over the young man. The counsels of his friend, co-operating with the sentiments of his own heart and with the memory of Madame Bonancieux, which was but rarely absent from him, had made him resolve, now that his pride was satisfied, to see her ladyship no more. As his only answer, he took a pen and wrote the following letter:

" Do not reckon any more on me, madame. Now tha I am becoming convalescent, I have so many interview of the same kind to grant that I must put them int some regular order. When your turn comes round, shall have the honor to inform you. I kiss your hands

" COMTE DE WARDES."

Not a word said about the sapphire; the Gasco wished to keep it for the present, as a weapon agains her ladyship.

It would be wrong to judge of the actions of one ag by the habits of another. Conduct which would now b regarded as a disgrace to a gallant man seemed at tha time quite simple and natural. And younger sons of th best families were often supported by their mistresses.

D'Artagnan handed the open letter to Kitty, who rea it at first without understanding it, and who very nearl went out of her mind when she read it a second time.

Kitty scarcely could believe such happiness, an D'Artagnan was obliged to repeat to her verbally th assurance which the letter gave in writing. Whatev might be the danger which, on account of the passiona character of her mistress, the poor girl incurred in delive ing such a note to her ladyship, none the less did sh run back, as fast as her legs could carry her, to th Place Royale.

The heart of the kindest woman is pitiless toward rival's pains.

Her ladyship opened the letter with an eagerne equal to that with which the Abigail had brought it but at the first words that she read she became actuall livid; then she crushed the letter in her hand an turned, with lightning in her eyes, on Kitty.

" What is this letter ? " said she.

" It is the answer to your ladyship's," said the tren bling Kitty.

" Impossible ! " exclaimed the lady; " impossib that a gentleman should have written such a letter to lady ! "

Then, suddenly, she cried:

"My God! could he know——"

She checked herself, shuddering. She ground her teeth—her face was of an ashy color. She endeavored to take a step toward the window for air, but she could only stretch out her arms; her strength failed her and she sunk back into an easy-chair.

Kitty, thinking she was fainting, rushed forward to open her corset. But raising herself up suddenly, she exclaimed:

"What do you want? why do you touch me?"

"I thought your ladyship was ill and I wished to assist you," replied the poor damsel, frightened at the terrible expression which the countenance of her mistress had assumed.

"*I* unwell! Do you take me for a weak woman? When I am insulted I do not fall ill—I seek for my revenge. Do you hear?"

And she motioned Kitty to leave the room.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

THE DREAM OF VENGEANCE.

In the evening Her Ladyship gave orders that M. D'Artagnan should be admitted as usual, as soon as he came. But he came not.

On the next morning Kitty went again to see D'Artagnan and told him all that had occurred on the previous day. D'Artagnan smiled. This jealous anger of her ladyship was his revenge.

The impatience of the indignant lady had increased by night. She renewed her orders relative to the young Gascon; but as on the preceding evening, her expectations were in vain.

On the next morning Kitty visited D'Artagnan. She was, however, no longer joyous and alert, as on the

previous days, but, on the contrary, overcome with grief.

D'Artagnan inquired of the poor girl what ailed her, but the latter, as her sole reply, drew from her pocket a letter which she handed to him.

This letter was in her ladyship's handwriting, only on this occasion it was really destined for D'Artagnan, and not for M. de Wardes.

He opened it and read as follows :

" DEAR M. D'ARTAGNAN,—It is wrong thus to neglect your friends, especially when about to part for so long a time. I and my brother looked for you in vain both yesterday and the day before. Will it be the same this evening ? "

" This is all very plain," said D'Artagnan, " and I expected this letter. My credit rises as that of the Count de Wardes falls."

" And will you go ? " asked Kitty.

" Listen, my dear child," replied the Gascon, who sought to excuse himself in his own eyes for failing to keep his promise to Athos. " You must see that it would be imprudent to refuse so positive an invitation. Her ladyship, seeing that I kept away, would wonder at the cessation of my visits and might perhaps suspect something. Who can tell the limits of such a woman's vengeance ? "

" Oh, my God ! " exclaimed Kitty, " you know how to represent things in such a way that you are always right. But you will go and pay your court to her again ; and if you should happen to please her now, with your own face and under your true name, it will be ever far worse than before ! "

The poor girl guessed by instinct a part of what was about to occur.

D'Artagnan comforted her as well as he was able and promised her that he would remain insensible to her ladyship's seductions.

He sent word, by way of answer, that he was as grateful as man could be for her ladyship's kindness and that he would not fail to wait upon her as she commanded; but he did not venture to write to her, lest, to her experienced eyes, he should be unable to sufficiently disguise his handwriting.

By nine o'clock D'Artagnan was at the Place Royale. It was obvious that the servants, who were waiting in the ante-chamber, had received their orders, for as soon as he had appeared, before he had even inquired if her ladyship was to be seen, one of them hastened to announce him.

"Show him in," said the lady, in a voice so piercing that he heard it in the ante-chamber.

He was at once admitted.

"Not at home to anybody," said her ladyship; "do you hear? Not to anybody."

D'Artagnan observed the lady with great curiosity. She was pale and her eyes were heavy, either from weeping or from want of sleep. The customary lights in the room had been designedly diminished in number, and yet the woman could not conceal the traces of the fever which had been consuming her for two days. D'Artagnan approached her with his usual gallantry and she made a mighty effort to receive him, but never did a more agitated face belie a more enchanting smile.

To D'Artagnan's questions respecting her health she replied:

"Bad, very bad."

"Then," said D'Artagnan, "I am indiscreet in coming; you are unquestionably in want of a little quiet and I will immediately retire."

"No," said her ladyship, "remain, M. d'Artagnan. Your pleasing company will, on the contrary, give me great relief."

"She has never spoken to me so charmingly before," thought D'Artagnan; "let me be upon my guard."

Her ladyship assumed the most affectionate air possible, and gave her utmost charm to her conversation.

At the same time that fever, which had for a moment left her, returned, to restore the lustre to her eyes, the color to her cheeks and the carmine to her lips. D'Artagnan again saw the Circe who had already encompassed him with her enchantments. Her ladyship smiled and D'Artagnan felt that he would dare perdition for that smile.

There was a moment during which he experienced something like remorse for what he had plotted against her.

Her ladyship became by degrees more communicative. She asked D'Artagnan whether his heart was occupied by any love?

"Alas!" said he, assuming the most sentimental manner that he was able, "how can you be so cruel as to ask me such a question—me, who ever since I first saw you, have only breathed and lived by you and for you!"

The lady smiled most strangely.

"And so you love me?" said she.

"Need I tell you so now, and have you never perceived it?"

"Yes, I have; but you know the prouder hearts are, the more difficult they are to win."

"Ah, no difficulties can ever daunt me," replied D'Artagnan; "my only fear is of impossibilities."

"Nothing is impossible," said the lady, "to one who truly loves."

"Nothing, madame?"

"Nothing," replied she.

"I' faith," thought D'Artagnan, "her tune is changed. Will the capricious creature chance to fall in love with me? and will she be disposed to give me another sapphire, equal to that she gave me for De Wardes?"

"Come," resumed her ladyship, "let me hear what you would do to prove the love that you profess?"

"Everything that you can ask. Command and I am ready to obey."

"Everything?"

"Yes, everything!" exclaimed D'Artagnan, who knew beforehand that he did not risk much by such an engagement.

"Well, then, let us talk about it," said she, drawing her chair nearer D'Artagnan.

"I am all attention, madame," said the latter.

The lady paused for a moment, thoughtful and undecided; then appearing to form a resolution, she said:

"I have an enemy."

"You, madame!" cried D'Artagnan, feigning surprise. "My God! good and beautiful as you are, is it possible?"

"A mortal enemy!"

"Indeed?"

"An enemy who has so cruelly insulted me that there is war to the knife between us. Can I reckon upon you as an ally?"

D'Artagnan instantly perceived what the vindictive creature was aiming at.

"You can, madame," said he, emphatically. "My arm and my life belong to you, as well as my love."

"Well, then," said her ladyship, "since you are as generous as you are enamored——" She hesitated.

"Well?" demanded D'Artagnan.

"Well," returned her ladyship, after a moment's silence, "cease from this day to speak of impossibilities."

"Do not overwhelm me with my happiness!" exclaimed D'Artagnan, throwing himself on his knees and covering with kisses the hands which she abandoned to him.

"Yes!" thought the lady, "avenge me on that wretch, De Wardes, and I shall easily get rid of you afterward—double fool! animated sword-blade!"

"Yes!" thought D'Artagnan also on his side, "tell me that you love me, after having so audaciously deceived me, and then, dangerous and hypocritical woman! I will laugh at you, with him whom you wish to punish by my hand."

Raising his head, D'Artagnan said, "I am waiting."

"You understand me, then, dear Monsieur d'Artagnan?" said her ladyship.

"I can read your every look."

"Then you will, for me, employ that arm which has already gained such great renown?"

"Yes, instantly."

"And how," said her ladyship, "shall I ever repay a service so important?"

"Your love is the only recompense I desire—the only one that would be worthy either of you or me," replied D'Artagnan, and he drew her gently toward him. She made but little resistance.

"Interested creature!" said she, smiling.

"Ah!" exclaimed D'Artagnan, carried away an instant by the passion which this woman had the power of exciting in his heart; "ah! your love appears to me improbable, and fearful of seeing it vanish like a dream, I am impatient to receive from your own lips the assurance of its reality."

"Do you already merit such an avowal?"

"I am at your command," replied D'Artagnan.

"Are you quite determined?" said she, with a lingering doubt.

"Name the wretch who has drawn tears from your beautiful eyes!"

"And who has told you that I have wept?" exclaimed she.

"I imagined so."

"Women of my character never weep," replied her ladyship.

"So much the better. But tell me his name?"

"Remember that his name is my secret."

"Yet I must know it."

"Yes, you must. See what confidence I place in you."

"You overpower me with joy! What is his name?"

"You know him."

"Indeed!"

"Yes."

"It is not one of my friends?" said he, feigning hesitation, as an evidence of his ignorance.

"And if it was one of your friends would you hesitate?" said her ladyship, while a threatening flash glittered in her eyes.

"Not if it was my own brother!" exclaimed D'Artagnan, as if carried away by enthusiasm.

Our Gascon advanced without danger, for he knew where he was going.

"I love your devotedness," said the lady.

"Alas! do you love only that in me?" said D'Artagnan.

"I love you also—you," replied she, taking his hand.

And this pressure made D'Artagnan tremble as though the fever which her ladyship was enduring had also infected him.

"You love me—you?" exclaimed he. "Oh! if that should come to pass, such bliss would deprive me of reason!"

He took her in his arms. She made no attempt to escape from his kisses, but she did not return them. Her lips were cold. It seemed to D'Artagnan that he was embracing a statue.

D'Artagnan was, in fact, intoxicated with joy, and in his delirium he almost believed in the tenderness of her ladyship and in the crime of De Wardes. If the latter had been at that moment near him he would have slain him.

The lady seized the opportunity.

"He is called," she uttered in her turn.

"De Wardes—I know it!" interrupted D'Artagnan.

"And how do you know it?" asked she, seizing his two hands and looking into his eyes, as if striving to read his very soul.

D'Artagnan felt that he had allowed himself to be hurried into a false step.

"Tell me, tell me, then!" she exclaimed, "how do you know it?"

"How do I know it?" replied D'Artagnan.

"Yes!"

"I know it, because yesterday, in a drawing-room where I was, De Wardes displayed a ring, which he said you gave him."

"The wretch!" exclaimed her ladyship.

It will be easily understood that this epithet resounded in the very depths of D'Artagnan's heart.

"Well?" continued she.

"Well, I will avenge you on this—wretch!" said D'Artagnan, giving himself the airs of Don Japhet of Armenia.

"Thanks, my brave friend!" exclaimed the lady. "And when shall I be avenged?"

"To-morrow—immediately—whenever you command!"

Her ladyship was about to exclaim,—"Immediately!" but she reflected that such precipitation would be but little complimentary to D'Artagnan. She had, moreover, a thousand precautions to recommend and a thousand counsels to impress on her defender, that he should avoid all explanations with the count in the presence of witnesses.

"To-morrow," resumed D'Artagnan, "you shall be avenged or I shall be no more."

"No," said she, "avenge me and you will not die. He is a coward."

"Toward women, perhaps, but with men—I know something of him myself."

"Why, it seems to me that in your former contest with him you had no reason to complain of fortune."

"Fortune is a fickle jade; to-day favorable, she may betray me to-morrow."

"Does this mean that you hesitate now?"

"No, I do not hesitate; God forbid! But would it be just to permit me to go to possible death without giving me a little something more than hope?"

Her ladyship replied by a look which said, "Is that all? Speak." Then she said tenderly, "That is but too just."

"You are an angel," cried the young man.

"Then all is arranged?" said she.

"Except what I ask of you, my love."

"Have I not assured you?"

"I cannot wait!"

"Silence! I hear my brother; it is unnecessary that he should find you here."

She rang the bell and Kitty entered.

"Go through this door," said she to D'Artagnan, as she opened a small secret door, "and return at eleven o'clock, when we can end this conversation. Kitty will conduct you to me."

As the poor girl heard these few words she felt as if she would sink into the earth.

"Well! what are you about, mademoiselle, that you stand there as motionless as a statue? Come, show this gentleman out! Remember, at eleven to-night."

"It appears that all your appointments are for eleven o'clock," thought D'Artagnan; "it is an established habit."

The lady gave him her hand, which he kissed with effusion.

"Well," thought he, as he went away, scarcely replying to the reproaches of Kitty, "well, I must not make a fool of myself; unquestionably this woman is an abominable wretch—I must be on my guard!"

CHAPTER XXXVII.

THE LADY'S SECRET.

D'ARTAGNAN had gone out of the mansion, instead of at once ascending to Kitty's room, there to wait for the hour of his appointment with her ladyship. He had two reasons for adopting this course: the first was, that by this means he avoided the recriminations and entreaties of the girl, and the second was, that he wished

coldly to reflect on, and, if possible, to penetrate the secret thoughts of the lady.

What seemed to him most certain was that he was exposing himself to love her ladyship like a madman; whilst she, on the other hand, did not love him the least in the world and never would. At one time he considered that the best thing to do would be to return home and write a long letter to her ladyship, in which he would confess, that, as far as he was concerned, he and De Wardes were the same individual, and, consequently, that it was only by suicide he could kill De Wardes. But he had also a fierce desire for vengeance. He wished to conquer this woman in his own name. And as this vengeance was sweet to him he could not bear to relinquish the idea of it.

He strode five or six times round the Place Royale, agitated by all these conflicting emotions, returning at every circuit to regard the light which was still visible through the blinds of her ladyship's apartment. It was manifest that she was not, on this occasion, in such eager haste to return to her chamber.

At length the light disappeared; with it was extinguished all the irresolution in D'Artagnan's heart. He recalled each detail of the interview which he had with her ladyship, and by one of those revulsions so common in similar cases he entered the house with his heart beating and his head on fire, and rushed into Kitty's room.

The poor girl, pale as death and trembling in every limb, would have kept D'Artagnan back; but her mistress, with her ear on the watch, had heard the noise he had made in entering and opened the door.

"Come," said she.

D'Artagnan was no longer sane. He felt himself entangled in one of those fantastic intrigues which visit us in dreams. He advanced toward her ladyship, attracted by the magnetic power which the loadstone exercises over steel.

The door was closed behind them.

Kitty, in her turn, rushed forward to the door.

Jealousy and fury and offended pride—all the passions, in a word, which rule the heart of an enamored woman—impelled her to a confession. But she would be herself ruined if she admitted her participation in such a trickery, and above all D'Artagnan would be forever lost to her. This last thought of love still urged her to the crowning sacrifice.

D'Artagnan, upon his side, had reached the heights of his desire. It was not now a rival who was loved in his person, it was himself to whom the semblance of love was given. A secret voice from the depths of his own heart truly told him that he was only a weapon, which was caressed until it had inflicted death; but pride and self-love and folly silenced this voice and stifled this murmur; and besides, our Gascon, with the degree of confidence which we know him to possess, compared himself to De Wardes and inquired why, all things being considered, he should not be loved for himself alone.

He abandoned himself entirely to the sensations of the moment. Her ladyship was for the time being a living, passionate woman, abandoning herself to love, which she herself seemed to feel. Two hours thus passed. After the transports of the two lovers became calmer, the lady, who had not the same motives for forgetfulness as D'Artagnan, inquired whether the measures which were to bring about a meeting with De Wardes on the next day were all definitely determined on beforehand, in his mind.

But D'Artagnan, whose ideas had taken quite another course, forgot himself, like a fool, and gallantly answered that it was not in her presence, when he was occupied with nothing but the happiness of seeing and of hearing her, that he could think of duels with the sword.

This coldness on the only subject which interested her, frightened her ladyship and her questions became more pressing.

When D'Artagnan, who had never seriously thought of this impossible duel, endeavored to turn the conversation, he found himself unable.

Her ladyship kept the conference within the limits she had herself traced beforehand, with her irresistible spirit and her iron will.

D'Artagnan then thought himself very clever in endeavoring to persuade her to renounce, by forgiving De Wardes, the furious projects she had formed.

But at the first words that he uttered she started away from him.

"Are you afraid, dear M. d'Artagnan?" cried she, in a high and mocking tone, that sounded strangely in the darkness.

"You cannot think so, my adored," replied D'Artagnan; "but what if this poor Count de Wardes was less culpable than you imagine?"

"In any case," said her ladyship, seriously, "he has deceived me, and from that moment has deserved death."

"Then he shall die, since you condemn him!" said D'Artagnan, in a tone so firm that it appeared to her ladyship the expression of an unconquerable devotedness.

She drew near to him once more.

We do not know how long the night seemed to her ladyship, but it only seemed two hours to D'Artagnan before morning. Seeing that he was about to arise, her ladyship reminded him of his promise to avenge her on Count de Wardes.

"Yes, I am prepared," continued D'Artagnan, with an involuntary excitement; "but first, there is one thing that I would fain be sure of."

"What?" inquired the lady.

"That you love me."

"I have given you proof of it, I think," replied she.

"Yes! And I am yours, body and soul."

"Thanks, my brave defender; and even as I prove my love by admitting you here, you will, in your turn, prove yours—will you not?"

"Certainly. But if you love me as you say," resumed D'Artagnan, "have you no fear on my account?"

"What need I fear?"

"I might be wounded dangerously, even killed."

"Impossible," said the lady; "you are so valiant a man and so skillful a swordsman."

"Then you would not prefer," resumed D'Artagnan, "a method which would equally well avenge you, yet render the combat unnecessary?"

The lady looked at the young man in silence; her clear eyes had an expression singularly malevolent.

"Really," said she, "I verily believe that you are hesitating again."

"No, I have no hesitation, but this poor De Wardes awakens my compassion, now that you no longer love him; and it appears to me that a man must be sufficiently punished by the loss of your love without the need of further chastisement."

"And who has told you that I ever loved him?" asked her ladyship.

"At least, I may believe without any great folly that you have loved another," replied the young man, gallantly, "and I repeat that I am interested in the count."

"You?" demanded the lady. "And why?"

"Because I alone know——"

"What?"

"That he has been far less culpable toward you than he might appear."

"Really!" said the lady, with an uneasy look. "Explain yourself, for, upon my word, I cannot understand what you mean."

And she looked at D'Artagnan, who held her in his embrace, with eyes which were gradually lighted up by a more baleful flame.

"Yes, I am a man of honor," said D'Artagnan, determined now to finish what he had begun; "and, since you have confessed your love for me, since I am quite sure of possessing it—for I possess it, do I not?"

"Entirely! But go on."

"Well, then, I find myself quite transformed, and a confession forces itself upon me."

"A confession?"

"If I doubted your love I would not venture on it; but you do love me—do you not?"

"Of course."

"Then, if through excess of love for you I had committed a fault, you would forgive me?"

"Perhaps so. But this confession," said she, becoming pale—"what is this confession?"

"You had an interview with De Wardes last Thursday in this very chamber, had you not?"

"I? No! it is not true," said the lady, in a tone so firm and with a countenance so passionless, that had D'Artagnan not possessed such perfect certainty he must have doubted.

"Do not lie, my beautiful angel," said D'Artagnan, endeavoring to smile; "it is useless."

"What do you mean? Speak, then, for you kill me!"

"Oh, be at ease! you are not culpable toward me and I have already forgiven you."

"What next—what next?"

"De Wardes has nothing to boast of."

"How? You told me yourself that this ring——"

"That ring I myself have! The De Wardes of Thursday and the D'Artagnan of to-day are one and the same person."

The imprudent young man expected a surprise, mixed with bashfulness—a little storm, which would dissolve in tears, but he strangely deceived himself and his error was quickly apparent.

Pale and terrible, her ladyship raised herself up, and repelling D'Artagnan by a violent blow on the breast, she leaped out of bed.

D'Artagnan restrained her by her robe, in order to implore her pardon. But by a powerful and resolute effort she endeavored to escape. In this effort her robe gave way, and then, one of her beautiful shoulders being uncovered, D'Artagnan, with inexpressible horror, perceived upon it the fleur-de-lis—that indelible mark impressed by the degrading hand of the executioner.

"Great God!" exclaimed he, letting fall the robe

nd he remained mute, motionless and horror-stricken n the bed.

But the lady felt herself denounced, even by D'Artanan's horror. Doubtless he had seen everything. The oung man now knew her secret—that terrible secret of hich the whole world was ignorant, except himself.

She turned, no longer like a furious woman, but like wounded panther.

"Ah, wretch!" said she, "you have betrayed me like coward; and, moreover, you have learned my secret! ou must die!"

And she ran to an inlaid cabinet on her toilet table, pened it with a feverish, trembling hand, drew from it small dagger, with a golden hilt and a sharp and lender blade, and returned with one bound to D'Agnan, who remained half naked on the bed.

Although the young man was, as we know, brave, he as frightened at that convulsed countenance, at those orribly dilated pupils, at those pale cheeks and bleedng lips; he arose and recoiled, as at the hissing of a erpent that had coiled about his path, and instinctvely putting his damp hand to his sword, he drew it rom the sheath.

But without being at all dismayed at the sight of the word, her ladyship still advanced toward him to strike im and only stopped when she felt the sharp point at er bosom.

Then she attempted to seize the sword in her hands; ut D'Artagnan always withheld it from her grasp, by ointing it, without touching her, sometimes at her eyes nd sometimes at her breast; whilst he still retreated nd endeavored to find the door which opened into Kitty's room.

During all this time her ladyship was rushing at him n horrible transports of rage and screaming in a frantic manner.

Nevertheless, as this was ending in a strong resemblance to a duel, D'Artagnan gradually recovered his coolness.

"Well done! beautiful lady, well done!" said he "but, for God's sake, be calm, or I will draw a second fleur-de-lis on your other shoulder."

"Wretch! wretch!" vociferated her ladyship.

But D'Artagnan, still seeking the door, merely maintained himself on the defensive.

At the noise that they made by overturning the furniture—she to get at him, and he to get behind the furniture, out of the way—Kitty opened the door. D'Artagnan, who had never ceased manœuvring to get near this door, was only three paces from it. With one bound, therefore, he sprang out of the lady's chamber into that of her maid, and as quick as lightning closed the door again and leaned against it with his weight whilst Kitty secured the bolts.

Her ladyship then endeavored with a force far beyond the strength of an ordinary woman to break down the barriers that confined her to her own room, but finding this impossible she stabbed the door with her dagger sometimes penetrating the entire thickness of the wood. Each blow was accompanied by some horrid imprecation.

"Quick, quick, Kitty!" said D'Artagnan in a whisper when the bolts were locked. "Make haste and let me out of the hotel, or she will have me killed by the lackeys. Let us be quick, do you hear? for it is a matter of life and death."

"But you can't go out naked," said Kitty.

"True," said D'Artagnan, thinking for the first time of his plight. "Dress me as best you can, dear; but be quick, for it's life or death, you know."

Kitty knew only too well and in a moment wrapped him in a flowered mantle, a hood and a cloak. She also put slippers on his naked feet and drew him down the stairs in the darkness. And it was time. Her ladyship had already rung and aroused the whole of her establishment. The porter drew the cord, at Kitty's voice, at the very instant that his mistress screamed from the window, "Do not let him go!"

The young man fled whilst she still menaced him with

impotent gestures. At the same moment he was lost to sight she fell senseless in her chamber.

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

HOW, WITHOUT DISTURBING HIMSELF, ATHOS OBTAINED HIS EQUIPMENT.

D'ARTAGNAN was so completely confounded that, without considering what would become of Kitty, he ran through half of Paris and did not stop till he found himself at Athos's door. The confusion of his mind, the terror which spurred him on, the cries of some of the patrol who had pursued him, only made him the more expeditious in his progress. He traversed the court, mounted the two flights of stairs, and knocked as if he would break down the door.

Grimaud opened it, with his eyes swollen by sleep, and D'Artagnan rushed into the ante-chamber with such violence as almost to overthrow him as he passed.

This time, at any rate, in spite of his habitual taciturnity, Grimaud found his tongue. At the sight of D'Artagnan's naked sword the poor fellow fancied that he had to deal with some assassin.

"Help, help! murder!" exclaimed he.

"Be silent, unlucky dog!" said the young man; "I am D'Artagnan. Do you not know me? Where is your master?"

"You, M. d'Artagnan!" exclaimed the panic-stricken Grimaud. "Impossible!"

"Grimaud!" said Athos, as he quietly emerged from his chamber in his dressing-gown; "Grimaud, I believe you are permitting yourself to speak!"

"Ah! sir, it is because——"

"Silence!"

Grimaud then contented himself with pointing to D'Artagnan with his finger.

Athos, phlegmatic as he was, burst out into a fit of laughter, which was occasioned by D'Artagnan's wild appearance and strange dress.

"Do not laugh, my friend!" exclaimed D'Artagnan; "in the name of Heaven, do not laugh! for, upon my soul, I assure you that there is nothing to laugh at."

He uttered these words with so much solemnity and with such undissembled horror that Athos immediately seized his hands, saying:

"Are you wounded, my friend? You are very pale."

"No, but something very terrible has just happened to me. Are you alone, Athos?"

"Zounds! who do you imagine would be with me at this time of night?"

"Good! good!" And D'Artagnan hurried into Athos's chamber.

"Well, speak now," said the latter, bolting the door; "is the king dead? Have you killed the cardinal? You are altogether unnerved. Come, speak, for I am dying with anxiety."

"Athos," replied D'Artagnan, "prepare to hear something perfectly incredible—terrible."

"Speak, then, speak," said Athos.

"Well, then," continued D'Artagnan, bending toward Athos's ear and whispering, "her ladyship is branded with a fleur-de-lis upon her shoulder!"

"Ah!" exclaimed the musketeer, as if he had received a bullet in his heart.

"But are you quite sure," continued D'Artagnan "that *the other* is really dead?"

"*The other!*" murmured Athos, in a voice so faint that D'Artagnan could scarcely hear it.

"Yes; she of whom you told me one day at Amiens."

Athos groaned and his head fell upon his hands.

"This one," said D'Artagnan, "is a woman of from twenty-six to twenty-eight years of age."

"Fair?" said Athos.

"Yes."

"With clear blue eyes of an uncommon brightness nd with black eyelashes and eyebrows?"

"Yes."

"Tall and well-formed? Has she also lost a tooth, ear the eye-tooth, on the left side?"

"Yes."

"The fleur-de-lis is small, of a pink color, as if somewhat effaced by the layers of paste which are applied o it?"

"Yes."

"And yet you say that this woman is English?"

"She is called 'Milady,' but she may, nevertheless, e a Frenchwoman; Lord de Winter is only her brother-n-law."

"I must see her, D'Artagnan!"

"Take care, Athos, take care! You wished to kill er; she is a woman who would willingly pay you back nd is not likely to fail."

"She dare not say anything—it would be denouncing erself."

"She is equal to anything! Did you ever see her urious?"

"No," said Athos.

"A tigress! a panther! Ah, my dear Athos, I fear have drawn down upon us both a terrible vengeance." D'Artagnan then recounted everything—the lady's ad rage and her menace of death.

"You are quite right, and, upon my soul, I would sell y life for a hair," said Athos. "Happily, however, we ave Paris the day after to-morrow and probably shall o to La Rochelle. Once off——"

"She will pursue you to the end of the world, Athos, hould she recognize you. Let her, then, vent her hatred n me alone.'

"Ah, my friend, what does it signify if she should ill me?" said Athos. "Do you for an instant suppose that I am at all anxious to live?"

"There is some horrible mystery under all this, Athos. am certain that this woman is one of the cardinal's spies."

"In that case, take care of yourself. If the cardina does not greatly admire you for that London affair, h hates you thoroughly; but as he has, in fact, nothin to bring forward openly against you and yet mus gratify his revenge, take care of yourself. If you g out, do not go alone; if you eat, use every precaution distrust everything, even your own shadow."

"Happily," said D'Artagnan, "we only need to manag till to-morrow evening without accident, for when onc with the army I hope we shall only have men to fear."

"In the meantime," said Athos, "I renounce m plan of seclusion and I will go everywhere with you You must return to the Rue des Fossoyeurs and I wi accompany you."

"Be it so, my dear Athos; but first let me return t you this ring which I received from that woman. Thi sapphire is yours. Did you not tell me that it was family jewel?"

"Yes; my father gave two thousand crowns for i as he formerly told me; it was amongst the marriag presents that he made my mother. It is magnificen My mother gave it to me, and instead of guarding it a a sacred relic, madman that I was, I gave it to tha wicked woman!"

"Well, take back your ring, for I understand ho much you prize it."

"*I* take it, after it has passed through that wretch' hands? Never! the ring is polluted, D'Artagnan!"

"Then sell it or pledge it; you can borrow a thousan crowns on it. With that sum you will be well off; an then with the first money you obtain you can redeem i cleansed of its ancient stains, since it will have passe through the hands of usurers."

Athos smiled.

"You are a charming companion, my dear D'A tagnan," said he; "your eternal gaiety revives th souls of the afflicted. Well, then, let us pledge this rin of mine on one condition."

"And what is that?"

"That you shall take five hundred crowns and I will have five hundred."

"But think a moment, Athos. I shall not want a quarter of that sum—who am only in the guards; and by selling my saddle I can easily procure it. What do I really want? A horse for Planchet, nothing more. Besides, you forget that I have a ring also."

"Which you value even more than I do mine; at least I think I have so observed."

"Yes; for in extremities it might relieve us not only from great embarrassment, but even from great danger. It is not a simple diamond—it is also an enchanted talisman."

"I do not understand you, yet I believe what you say. But to return to my ring, or rather ours; you shall take half the sum it may produce or I will throw it into the Seine; and I much doubt whether, as in the case of Polycrates, a fish would be so obliging as to bring it back to us."

"Well, then, I agree," said D'Artagnan.

At this moment Grimaud came in, accompanied by Planchet, who was uneasy about his master and anxious to know what had happened to him.

Athos dressed himself, and when he was ready to go out made the sign of a man taking aim to Grimaud. The latter immediately took down his carbine and prepared to follow his master.

D'Artagnan and Athos, attended by their servants, reached the Rue des Fossoyeurs in safety. M. Bonancieux was at his door and looked at D'Artagnan with a bantering air.

"Halloo, my dear lodger," said he, "make haste. There is a pretty young girl waiting for you, and ladies, you know, do not like to be kept waiting."

"It is Kitty!" exclaimed D'Artagnan, as he rushed toward the stairs.

In fact, on the landing-place before his apartment, crouching against his door, he found the trembling girl. As soon as she saw him, she exclaimed:

"You promised me your protection—you promised to save me from her anger; remember, it is you who have ruined me!"

"Yes, certainly," said D'Artagnan; "make yourself easy about that, Kitty. But what happened after I was gone?"

"I can scarcely tell," replied Kitty. "At the outcries that she made the servants ran to her. She was furious with passion. Whatever can be uttered in the way of imprecation she vomited forth against you. Then I knew she would soon remember that it was through my room that you had entered hers and would take me for your accomplice; so I collected the little money that I had and my most precious clothes, and ran hither for safety."

"Poor child! But what am I to do with you? I am going off the day after to-morrow."

"Anything you like, sir. Send me away from Paris—send me out of France."

"But I cannot take you with me to the siege of La Rochelle," said D'Artagnan.

"No; but you might place me in the service of some lady of your acquaintance—in your own country, for instance."

"Ah, my child, in my own province the ladies have no waiting-maids. But wait; I know what I will do. Planchet, go to Aramis and ask him to come here directly. We have matters of great importance to communicate."

"I understand," said Athos; "but why not Porthos? It appears to me that his marchioness——"

"Porthos's marchioness, sooner than keep a lady's maid, would have her clothes put on by her husband's clerks," said D'Artagnan, laughing. "Besides, Kitty would rather not live in the Rue aux Ours! Is not that so, Kitty?"

"I will live where you please," said Kitty, "provided I am concealed and that nobody knows where I am."

"But, Kitty, now that we are going to be parted and that you are therefore no longer jealous of me——"

"Sir," interrupted Kitty, "far or near, I shall never cease to love you."

"Where the deuce does constancy build its nest?" muttered Athos.

"And I, also," said D'Artagnan, "I, also, shall always love you, you may be sure. But now, answer me. This question is one of great importance—did you never hear anything said about a young woman who was carried off one night?"

"Wait a minute. Oh, my God, sir! Do you still love that woman?"

"No, it is one of my friends who loves her. Yes, it is Athos there."

"I!" exclaimed Athos, in a tone pretty much like that of the man who sees himself about to tread upon an adder.

"Yes, to be sure, you!" said D'Artagnan, pressing Athos's hand. "You know the interest we all take in that poor little Madame Bonancieux. Besides, Kitty will not tell, will you, Kitty? You understand, my child," exclaimed D'Artagnan, "that she is the wife of that ugly ape whom you saw upon the doorstep as you came in."

"Oh, my God!" exclaimed Kitty, "you remind me how frightened I was lest he should have recognized me!"

"How *recognized!* Then you have seen this man before?"

"Yes, he came twice to Milady's."

"Exactly so. About what time?"

"About a fortnight ago."

"Just about the time."

"And yesterday evening he came again."

"Yesterday evening?"

"Yes, only a few minutes before you came yourself."

"My dear Athos, we are enveloped in a web of spies! And do you believe that he knew you again, Kitty?"

"I drew down my hood when I saw him, but perhaps it was too late."

"Go down, Athos—he suspects you less than me—and see whether he is still at the door."

Athos went down and returned immediately.

"He is gone," said he, "and the house is shut up."

"He is gone to make his report and to say that all the pigeons are at this moment in the dove-cote."

"Well, then, let us be off," said Athos, "leaving only Planchet here to bring us intelligence."

"Wait one instant! And what about Aramis, whom we have sent for?"

"True," said Athos; "let us wait for Aramis."

An instant afterward Aramis entered. They explained the affair to him and told him how urgent it was for him to find, amongst some of his high connections, a situation for Kitty.

"And will this really be a service to you, D'Artagnan?"

"I will be grateful for it forever."

"Well, then, Madame de Bois Tracy has requested me to find a trustworthy waiting-maid for one of her friends who lives in the country; and if you, my dear D'Artagnan, can answer for the young woman——"

"Oh, sir!" exclaimed Kitty, "I shall be entirely devoted, be assured, to the lady who will give me the means of leaving Paris."

"Then," said Aramis, "nothing can be better."

He sat himself down at the table and wrote a short note, which he sealed with a ring and gave to Kitty.

"And now, my child," said D'Artagnan, "you know that this place is no safer for us than for you, so let us separate. We shall meet again in happier days."

"And at whatever time or place we may meet again, sir," said Kitty, "you will find I love you even more than I do now."

"A gamester's vow!" said Athos, whilst D'Artagnan was gone to accompany Kitty down the stairs.

A few minutes afterward the three friends separated, after making an appointment for four o'clock at Athos's chambers, and leaving Planchet to mind the house.

Aramis returned home, and Athos and D'Artagnan busied themselves pledging the sapphire.

As our Gascon had foreseen, they easily procured three hundred pistoles on the ring; and the Jew declared, moreover, that, if they chose to sell it, as it would make a splendid drop for ear-rings, he would give as much as five hundred pistoles for it.

Athos and D'Artagnan, with the activity of soldiers and the science of connoisseurs, spent scarcely three hours in purchasing the equipment of a musketeer. Besides, Athos had the character and manners of a nobleman even to his fingers' ends. Directly anything suited him he paid for it at once, without haggling to reduce the price. D'Artagnan wished to make some observations, but Athos laid his hand on his shoulder, smiling; and D'Artagnan understood that it was very well for a little Gascon gentleman like him to bargain, but not for a man who had the deportment of a prince.

The musketeer saw a superb Andalusian horse, as black as jet, with fiery nostrils and fine and elegant legs, rising six years. He examined it and found it faultless. He got it for a thousand francs. Perhaps he might have obtained it for less, but whilst D'Artagnan was discussing the price with the dealer, Athos counted down the hundred pistoles on the table.

Grimaud had a strong and short-limbed horse from Picardy, which cost three hundred francs.

But when the saddle of this latter horse and Grimaud's arms were bought, Athos had not one sou remaining of the hundred and fifty pistoles. D'Artagnan therefore begged his friend to bite a mouthful out of his share, which he could restore to him afterward, if he chose. But Athos only answered by shrugging his shoulders.

"How much did the Jew say he would give for the sapphire, to buy it out and out?" asked he, at last.

"Five hundred pistoles."

"That is two hundred pistoles more—a hundred for each of us. Why, that is quite a fortune! Let us go to the Jew again, my friend."

"But would you really sell it?"

"Yes; this ring would unquestionably recall melancholy memories. Besides, we shall never have three hundred pistoles to return to him; therefore we would actually lose two hundred by the bargain. Go and tell him that the ring is his, D'Artagnan, and come back with the two hundred pistoles."

"Reflect, Athos."

"Ready money is scarce in these times and we should learn to make sacrifices. Go, D'Artagnan, go. Grimaud shall bear you company with his carbine."

Half an hour afterward D'Artagnan returned with the two thousand livres, no accident having befallen him.

It was thus that Athos found, without giving himself any trouble, resources which he did not expect.

CHAPTER XXXIX.

A CHARMING VISION.

At the appointed hour the four friends were once more gathered at the house of Athos. All anxiety about equipments had disappeared and their faces no longer bore the marks of any but their own secret care; for behind all present happiness there lurks some fear about the future.

Suddenly Planchet entered, bearing two letters addressed to D'Artagnan. One was a little note delicately folded lengthwise, with a pretty seal of green wax, on which was depicted a dove bearing a green bough. The other was a large square epistle, glittering with the terrible arms of his eminence, the cardinal-duke.

At sight of the little letter D'Artagnan's heart bounded, for he believed he recognized the writing; and though he had only seen the hand once, the memory of it was engraved in his heart's core. So he took the note and unsealed it hastily.

"Walk out," it said, "about six or seven o'clock on Wednesday evening next, on the Chaillot road, and look carefully into the carriages as they pass. But if you value your own life, or that of some one who loves you, do not speak, do not make one motion which may show that you have recognized her who exposes herself to every ill only to see you for an instant."

There was no signature.

"It is a trap," said Athos; "do not go, D'Artagnan."

"And yet," said D'Artagnan, "I think that I know the writing well."

"But it may be feigned," said Athos. "At six or seven o'clock at this season the Chaillot road is completely deserted, as much so as if you went to walk in the Forest of Bondy."

"But suppose we all go?" said D'Artagnan. "Surely they could not eat us all four, besides the four servants, the horses and our arms; the act would certainly bring on a fit of indigestion."

"Besides, it will be a fine opportunity to display our equipments," said Porthos.

"But if it is a woman who writes," said Aramis, "and this woman does not wish to be seen, consider that you compromise her, D'Artagnan, which is not right in a gentleman."

"We will remain behind," said Porthos, "and he can advance alone."

"Yes, but a pistol-shot is easily fired from a carriage going at full speed."

"Bah!" said D'Artagnan, "it will miss me. And we would then overtake the carriage and exterminate whoever might be in it. It would be just so many enemies the fewer."

"He is right," said Porthos; "let us give battle. Besides, we must needs try our arms."

"Faith! let us treat ourselves to this pleasure," said Aramis, in his soft and careless way.

"Just as you please," said Athos.

"Gentlemen," said D'Artagnan, "it is now half-past four, and we have just time enough to get to the Chaillot road by six."

"Besides, if we go too late no one will see us," said Porthos; "and that would be a sad pity. Let us get ready, gentlemen."

"But this second letter," said Athos, "you forget that. And yet, I fancy, the seal indicates that it is worth opening. As for me, I confess, my dear D'Artagnan, that I think much more of it than of that little rose leaf which you so gently deposited just now over your heart."

D'Artagnan blushed.

"Well," said the young man, "let us now see what his eminence wants with me."

D'Artagnan opened the letter and read:

"M. d'Artagnan, of the king's guards, of M. des Essarts's company, is expected at the cardinal's palace at eight o'clock this evening. LAHOUDINIERE,

"Captain of the Guards."

"The devil!" said Athos, "here is an appointment not a whit less disquieting, in other respects, than the first."

"I will go to the second on returning from the first," said D'Artagnan. "One is at seven, the other at eight. There will be time enough for both."

"Hum! I would not go," said Aramis. "A gallant gentleman cannot decline an appointment made by a lady, but a prudent gentleman may excuse himself from waiting on his eminence, particularly when he has some reason to believe that he is not sent for to listen to compliments."

"I am of Aramis's opinion," said Porthos.

"Gentlemen," replied D'Artagnan, "I have formerly received a similar invitation from his eminence, through M. de Cavois. I neglected it and the next day a great misfortune happened to me—Constance disappeared. Whatever may be the result, I will go."

"If you are determined," said Athos, "go."

"But the Bastile," said Aramis.

"Bah! you will get me out again," rejoined D'Artagnan.

"Certainly," replied Aramis and Porthos, with the greatest coolness and as if it had been the simplest thing in the world; "certainly we will pull you out again. But as we must be off to the wars the day after to-morrow, you would do better not to run the risk of getting in."

"Let us do better," said Athos; "let us not leave him throughout the evening. Let each of us, with three musketeers in company, wait at a gate of the palace. If we see any closed carriage that looks suspicious, coming out, we will fall upon it. It is a long time since we have had a crow to pluck with the cardinal's guards, and M. de Treville must think us dead."

"Decidedly, Athos," said Aramis; "you were cut out for the general of an army. What do you say to the plan, gentlemen?"

"Admirable!" cried the young men, in chorus.

"I have no horse," said D'Artagnan, "but I can go and take one of M. de Treville's."

"That is unnecessary," remarked Aramis; "you can have one of mine."

"How many have you, then?" inquired D'Artagnan.

"Three," replied Aramis, smiling.

"My dear fellow," said Athos, "you are certainly the best paid poet in France."

"Or in Navarre," added D'Artagnan.

"But listen, my dear Aramis," said Athos; "you will not know what to do with three horses, will you? I do not understand, indeed, why you bought three."

"Nor did I, in fact, buy more than two," replied Aramis.

"Did the third come from the clouds, then?"

"No; the third was brought to me this morning by a servant without livery, who would not tell me from whom he came, and who merely said that he had been ordered by his master——"

"Or his mistress," interrupted D'Artagnan.

"That makes no difference," said Aramis, coloring; "and who merely said that he had been ordered by his mistress to put this horse in my stable without leaving word from whom it came."

"It is only to poets such things ever happen," gravely remarked Athos.

"Well, then, in that case we can do better," said D'Artagnan. "Which of the two horses shall you ride, Aramis—that which you bought, or that which was given you?"

"That which was given to me, without doubt. You understand, D'Artagnan, that I could not so affront——"

"The unknown donor," added D'Artagnan.

"Or the unknown donatrix," said Athos.

"Then the horse you bought becomes of no further use to you?"

"Not much."

"You chose it yourself?"

"And with the greatest care. The safety of the horseman, you know, depends almost always on his horse."

"Well, then, let me have him at the price you gave."

"I was going to offer you this trifle, my dear D'Artagnan, giving you your own time to repay me."

"And how much did he cost you?"

"Eight hundred francs."

"Here are forty double pistoles, my dear friend," said D'Artagnan, taking that sum from his pocket. "I know that it is the same coin in which you are paid for poems."

"You are in funds, then?"

"Rich—rolling in wealth!" said D'Artagnan, rattling the rest of his pistoles in his pocket.

"Send your saddle, then, to the quarters of the musketeers and your horse shall be brought here with ours."

"Very well. But it is almost five o'clock. Let us make haste."

In about a quarter of an hour afterward Porthos appeared at the end of the Rue Ferou on a magnificent Spanish horse. Musqueton was following him on a small

but strong horse from Auvergne. Porthos was glittering with joy and pride.

At the same time Aramis was seen at the other end of the street mounted on a superb English steed. Bazin followed on a roan horse, leading a vigorous Mecklenburgian horse, which now belonged to D'Artagnan.

The two musketeers met at the door; Athos and D'Artagnan were looking down at them from the window.

"By my faith!" said Aramis, "you have a superb horse there, my friend."

"Yes," replied Porthos, "it is the one that was to have been sent at first. A foolish joke of a certain husband substituted the other, but the gentleman has been well punished since, and I have obtained satisfaction."

Grimaud appeared in his turn, leading his master's horse. D'Artagnan and Athos came down, got into their saddles by the side of their companions, and all four proceeded toward the quay—Athos on the horse for which he was indebted to his wife, Aramis on the horse for which he was indebted to his mistress, Porthos on the horse for which he was indebted to the attorney's wife, and D'Artagnan on the horse for which he was indebted only to his good fortune, which is the best of all mistresses.

The valets followed them.

As Porthos anticipated, the cavalcade produced a fine effect, and if Madame Coquenard had been in Porthos's path and could have seen how well he looked upon his fine Spanish steed, she would hardly have regretted the bleeding that she had performed upon her husband's strong-box.

Near the Louvre the four friends met M. de Treville returning from St. Germain. He stopped them to compliment them on their equipment, which drew around them in an instant a hundred loungers.

D'Artagnan took advantage of this circumstance to tell M. de Treville about the letter with the great red seal and ducal arms. It will be imagined that about the other letter he did not breathe a syllable.

M. de Treville approved of the resolution they had formed, and assured him that if he should not be seen again on the next day he would manage to find him out, wherever he might be.

At that moment the clock of the Samaritan struck six The four friends excused themselves on account of an engagement, and set off.

A short gallop took them to the Chaillot road. The day was beginning to decline. Carriages were passing backward and forward. D'Artagnan, guarded by his friends at a little distance, looked eagerly into every carriage, but saw no face he knew.

At length, after about a quarter of an hour's expectation, and as the twilight thickened around, a carriage advancing at the utmost speed of the horses was seen upon the Sèvres road. A presentiment announced to D'Artagnan that this carriage contained the individual who had made the appointment with him. The young man was himself astonished at the violent beating of his heart. Almost at the same instant a woman's head was visible at the window, with two fingers on the lips, as if to enjoin silence, or to send a kiss. D'Artagnan uttered a faint cry of joy. This woman, or rather this apparition, for the carriage passed with the rapidity of a vision, was Madame Bonancieux.

By an involuntary movement and in spite of the caution he had received D'Artagnan pushed his horse into a gallop and in a few bounds he was beside the carriage; but the window was hermetically closed, the vision was no longer there.

D'Artagnan then remembered the warning: "If you value your own life and that of those who love you, remain motionless, as if you had seen nothing."

He stopped, therefore, trembling, not for himself, but for the poor woman, who had evidently exposed herself to no trifling peril by the appointment she had made.

The carriage proceeded on its way and, still advancing rapidly, soon entered Paris and disappeared.

D'Artagnan had remained speechless on the same spot,

knowing not what to think. If it was really Madame Bonancieux and if she was returning to Paris, why this fugitive meeting, why this passing interchange of glances, why this kiss, committed to the winds? If, on the other hand, it was not really she—which was, in fact, very possible, for the insufficiency of light made error easy—might not this be the signal of an attack commenced by the love of a woman for whom his love was known?

The three companions gathered around him. They had all distinctly seen a woman's head at the window, but neither of them, except Athos, knew Madame Bonancieux. Athos believed that it was really that lady whom they had seen, but, having been less engrossed than D'Artagnan by that pretty face, he thought that he had seen a second head, a man's, at the back of the carriage.

"If that is the case," said D'Artagnan, "they are undoubtedly conveying her from one prison to another. But what can they want with the poor creature and how can I ever rescue or rejoin her?"

"My friend," said Athos, gravely, "remember that the dead are the only people we can never meet again on earth. You know something to that effect as well as I do, do you not? Now if your mistress is not really dead, if it was actually she whom we saw just now, at one time or another you two will meet again. And perhaps," added he, in those tones of misanthropy which were habitual to him, "perhaps more quickly even than you might have wished!"

It now struck half-past seven; the carriage had been twenty minutes beyond the appointed time. His friends reminded D'Artagnan that there was another visit to pay, which, however, it was yet possible for him to decline.

But D'Artagnan was, at the same time, both obstinate and curious. He had in his own mind determined to go to the cardinal's palace and to know what his eminence had to say to him. Nothing could make him change his resolution. They reached the Rue St. Honoré and the Place du Palais Cardinal, where they found the

twelve musketeers walking about whilst they awaited their companions. Then, first, was the business they had met for communicated to these brave allies.

D'Artagnan was well known to the honorable company of king's musketeers, amongst whom it was also understood that he would one day take his place; he was therefore regarded as a comrade, by anticipation. It resulted from this that every one willingly engaged in the affair to which they had been invited; they had, moreover, the probability of doing an ill turn to the cardinal or his people, and for such expeditions these worthy gentlemen were always well prepared.

Athos divided them into three parties: of one he took the command himself; the second he gave to Aramis, and the third to Porthos; and then each party placed itself in ambush, opposite an entrance to the palace.

D'Artagnan, on his part, boldly entered by the principal gate.

Although he felt himself strongly supported the young man did not ascend the grand staircase without uneasiness. His conduct toward her ladyship bore, indeed, some slight resemblance to treachery, and he suspected that there were political relations between this woman and the cardinal. Moreover, De Wardes, whom he had handled so roughly, was a faithful follower of his eminence, and D'Artagnan well knew that, if the cardinal was a terror to his enemies, he was also constant in his attachment to his friends.

"If De Wardes has related the details of our interview to his eminence, of which there can be no doubt, and if he has recognized me, which is probable, I may consider myself a condemned man," thought D'Artagnan, shaking his head. "But why should he have waited until to-day? It is clear enough her ladyship has made complaints against me, with all that hypocritical sorrow which renders her so interesting; and this last crime has made the vase run over. Fortunately," added he, "my good friends are below and they will not let me be

carried off without a struggle. And yet M. de Treville's company of musketeers, alone, cannot carry on a war against the cardinal, who disposes of the forces of all France and before whom the queen has no power and the king no will. D'Artagnan, my friend, thou art prudent, thou hast excellent qualities, but—women will destroy thee ! "

He had come to this sad conclusion just as he entered the ante-chamber. He gave his letter to the officer on duty, who showed him into the interior of the palace.

In this room there were five or six of his excellency's guards, who recognized D'Artagnan and, knowing that it was he who had wounded Jussac, looked at him with a singular smile.

This smile seemed to D'Artagnan a bad omen. But as our Gascon was not easily intimidated, or, rather, thanks to the abundant pride natural to the men of his province, did not easily betray what was passing in his mind when his emotions resembled fear, he stood boldly before the gentlemen of the guards and waited, with a hand upon his hip, in an attitude not shorn of dignity.

The officer entered and made a sign to D'Artagnan to follow.

It seemed to the young man that, as he left, the guards began to whisper to each other.

He went along a corridor, passed through a large salon, entered a library, and found himself before a man who was seated at a desk, writing.

The officer beckoned him in and retired without uttering a word.

D'Artagnan remained standing and examined this man.

At first D'Artagnan thought that he was in the presence of a judge, who was examining his papers ; but he soon saw that the man at the desk was writing, or rather correcting lines of an unequal length, and was scanning the words upon his fingers ; he found that he was in the presence of a poet. At the expiration of a minute the poet closed his manuscript, on the back of which was written, " Mirame ; a Tragedy in five acts."

He raised his head and D'Artagnan recognized the cardinal.

CHAPTER XL.

A TERRIBLE VISION.

RICHELIEU rested his elbow on his manuscript and his cheek on his hand and looked at D'Artagnan for an instant. No one had an eye more profoundly penetrating than the cardinal; and the young man felt this look running through his veins like quicksilver.

Nevertheless, he kept a good countenance, holding his hat in his hand and waiting his eminence's pleasure without too much pride, but at the same time without too much humility.

"Sir," said the cardinal, "are you one D'Artagnan, of Béarn?"

"Yes, my lord."

"There are several branches of the D'Artagnans in Tarbes, and in its neighborhood; to which of them do you belong?"

"I am the son of him who fought in the religious wars and with the great King Henry, the father of his gracious majesty."

"Ah, yes; it is you who set out from your native place about seven or eight months ago, to come and seek your fortune in the capital?"

"Yes, my lord."

"You came by Meung, where something happened to you—I do not exactly know what—but something?"

"My lord," said D'Artagnan, "this is what happened——"

"Unnecessary, quite unnecessary," interrupted the cardinal, with a smile which indicated that he knew the story quite as well as he who wished to tell it. "You were recommended to M. de Treville, were you not?"

"Yes, my lord, but in that unlucky affair at Meung——"

"The letter of introduction was lost," resumed his eminence. "Yes, I know that. But M. de Treville is a skillful physiognomist, who knows men at the first sight, and he has placed you in the company of his brother-in-law, M. des Essarts, leaving you to hope that some day or other you will be admitted into the musketeers."

"Your lordship is perfectly correct."

"Since that time many things have happened you: you walked behind the Chartreux one day, when you had much better had been elsewhere; then you made a journey to the waters of the Forges with your friends; they stopped upon the road, but you—you continued your journey. That was natural enough: you had business in England."

"My lord," said D'Artagnan, quite confounded, "I went——"

"To hunt at Windsor, or somewhere else. That is no business of anybody's. *I* know it, because it is my duty to know everything. On your return you were received by an august person. I see with pleasure that you have kept the memorial which she gave you."

D'Artagnan put his hand on the diamond which the queen had given him and quickly turned the stone inward, but it was too late.

"On the next day you were waited upon by Cavois," continued the cardinal; "he came to beg you to come to the palace. But you did not return that visit, and in that you were wrong."

"My lord, I feared that I had incurred your eminence's displeasure."

"And why so, sir? Because you had performed the orders of your superiors with more intelligence and courage than another could have done? Incur my displeasure when you merited praise? It is those who do not obey that I punish; and not those who, like you, obey—too well. And to prove it, recall the date of the day on which I sent for you to come to see me, and seek in your memory what happened on that very night."

It was the evening on which Madame Bonancieux was carried off. D'Artagnan shuddered, and he remembered that half an hour before the poor woman had passed before him, no doubt again borne away by the same power which directed that abduction.

"At last," continued the cardinal, "as I had heard nothing of you for some time, I wished to know what you were doing. Besides, you certainly owe me some thanks; you have yourself remarked what consideration has been always shown toward you."

D'Artagnan bowed respectfully.

"That," continued the cardinal, "proceeded not only from a sentiment of natural equity, but also from a plan that I had traced respecting you."

D'Artagnan was more and more astonished.

"It was my desire," continued the cardinal, "to explain this plan to you on the day that you received my first invitation, but you did not come. Fortunately, nothing has been lost by the delay, and to-day you shall hear it. Sit down, then, before me, M. d'Artagnan; you are gentleman enough not to be kept standing whilst you listen.

The cardinal pointed out a chair to the young man, who was so astonished at what was taking place that he waited, before he obeyed, for a second intimation from his interlocutor.

"You are brave, M. d'Artagnan," resumed his eminence; "and you are prudent, which is even better. I love men of head and heart. Do not be alarmed," he added, smiling; "by men of heart, I mean courageous men. But young as you are and scarcely entering the world, your enemies are very powerful. If you do not take care they will destroy you."

"Alas! my lord," replied the young man, "they will undoubtedly accomplish it very easily; for they are strong and well supported, whilst I stand alone."

"Yes, that is true; but alone as you are, you have already done much, and will, I doubt not, do still more. Yet you have, I believe, occasion for a guide in the

adventurous career you have undertaken; since, if I am not deceived, you have come to Paris with the ambitious intention of making a fortune."

"I am at the age of foolish hopes, my lord," said D'Artagnan.

"No hopes are foolish except for blockheads, sir, and you are a man of ability. Come, what would you say to an ensigncy in my guards and a company at the end of the campaign?"

"Ah, my lord!"

"You accept it, of course?"

"My lord——" replied D'Artagnan, with an embarrassed air.

"What? Do you decline it?" exclaimed the cardinal with a look of astonishment.

"I am in his majesty's guards, my lord, and I have no reason to be discontented."

"But it seems to me," said his eminence, "that my guards are also his majesty's guards; and that whoever serves in a French regiment serves the king."

"My lord, your eminence has misunderstood my words."

"You want a pretext, do you not? I understand. Very well! A pretext, here it is—promotion, the opening of a campaign, the opportunity which I offer you—these will be sufficient for the world; for yourself, the necessity of sure protection. For it is as well for you to be informed, M. d'Artagnan, that I have received serious complaints against you. You do not consecrate your nights and days exclusively to the service of the king."

D'Artagnan blushed.

"Moreover," added the cardinal, laying his hand on a roll of paper, "I have here a whole bundle of particulars about you. But before reading them, I wished to talk with you. I know that you are a man of resolution, and your services, if well directed, instead of leading to disaster, might benefit you greatly. Come, reflect and determine."

"Your goodness confounds me, my lord," replied D'Artagnan, "and I discover in your eminence a greatness of soul which makes me feel by your side insignificant as an earthworm; but in fact, since your eminence permits me to speak frankly——"

D'Artagnan stopped.

"Say on."

"Well, then, I will inform your eminence that all my friends are amongst the musketeers and the king's guards, and that all my enemies, by some inconceivable fatality, are in the service of your eminence. On this account I should be unwelcome here and despised there, if I accepted what you are good enough to offer."

"And can you already have the exalted idea that I do not offer you as much as you deserve, sir?" inquired the cardinal, with a scornful smile.

"My lord, your eminence is a hundred times too good to me, and, on the contrary, I do not think that I have yet done enough to be deserving of your kindness. The siege of La Rochelle is about to commence, my lord; I shall serve under your own eyes; and, if I shall have the good fortune to conduct myself in such a manner at the siege as to merit your approbation, it will be well! After that I shall at least have, in the past, some action of sufficient brilliancy to justify the protection with which your eminence may condescend to honor me. Everything should be effected at an opportune time. Perhaps, hereafter, I may have the right to give myself away; at present, I should be supposed to sell myself."

"That is to say, you refuse to serve me, sir?" said the cardinal, in a tone of anger, through which, however, might be traced a sentiment of esteem. "Remain in freedom, then, and still preserve your hatreds and your sympathies."

"My lord——"

"Well, well," continued the cardinal, "I am not offended with you, but you must understand—it is quite enough to protect and recompense one's friends—one owes nothing to one's enemies. And yet I will give you

one piece of advice. Take care of yourself, M. d'Artagnan, for, from the moment that I have withdrawn my hand from you, I would not give one farthing for your life."

"I will do my best, my lord," replied the Gascon, with unpresuming confidence.

"And hereafter, should any misfortune befall you, remember," said Richelieu, significantly, "that it is I who sought you and that I have done what I could to shield you from disaster."

"Let what may happen," said D'Artagnan, bowing, with his hand upon his breast, "I shall retain a sentiment of eternal gratitude to your eminence for what you are doing for me at the present time."

"Well, then, M. d'Artagnan, as you say, we shall see each other again; during the campaign I shall keep my eye upon you, for I shall be there," continued the cardinal, pointing to a magnificent suit of armor which he was to wear. "And on our return we will decide on some arrangement."

"Ah, my lord!" exclaimed D'Artagnan, "spare me the weight of your displeasure; remain neutral, my lord, if you find that I behave gallantly."

"Young man," said Richelieu, "if I can again say to you what I have said to you to-day, I promise you that I *will* do so."

This last expression of Richelieu involved a terrible doubt. It alarmed D'Artagnan more than a threat would have done, for it was a warning. It implied that the cardinal was endeavoring to screen him from some impending evil. He opened his lips to answer, but with an imperial gesture the cardinal dismissed him.

D'Artagnan left the room, but at the door his heart almost failed him and he was strongly tempted to return. Yet Athos's serious and severe countenance rose before his mind. If he agreed to what the cardinal proposed, Athos would no longer stretch him out his hand—Athos would disown him.

It was this fear that determined him, so powerful is

the influence of a truly noble character over all that approach it.

D'Artagnan went down by the same staircase that he had ascended and found before the door Athos and the four musketeers awaiting him, who were beginning to be anxious about him. With one word he reassured them, and Planchet ran to the other posts to announce that any further watch was unnecessary, as his master had returned safe and sound out of the cardinal's palace.

When they were housed at Athos's, Aramis and Porthos inquired about the object of this singular interview; but D'Artagnan merely told them that Richelieu had sent for him to offer him an ensign's commission in the guards and that he had refused it.

"And you were right!" exclaimed Aramis and Porthos, with one voice.

Athos fell into a profound reverie and said nothing. But when he was alone with D'Artagnan, he added:

"You have done right, although, perhaps, you have committed a mistake in doing so."

D'Artagnan sighed, for that voice responded to a secret whisper of his own soul, which announced that great misfortunes were impending.

The next day was occupied in preparations for departure.

D'Artagnan went to take leave of M. de Treville. At this time it was still believed that the separation of the guards and musketeers would be but momentary, the king holding his parliament that very day and proposing to set out on the next. M. de Treville therefore only asked D'Artagnan whether he wanted anything of him, but D'Artagnan replied that he had all he needed.

In the evening all the comrades of M. de Treville's and M. des Essarts's companies who had become attached to one another met together. They were about to part, to meet again when and if it should please God to let them. The night was, therefore, as may be supposed, a boisterous one; for on such occasions nothing but extreme indulgence can drive away excessive care.

The next day, at the first sound of the trumpets, the friends separated; the musketeers hastened to M. de Treville's hotel and the guards to that of M. des Essarts. Each captain led his company to the Louvre, where the king reviewed them.

His majesty was sad and seemed in ill health, which detracted somewhat from his usual dignified appearance. In fact, the evening before a fever had attacked him, even whilst he was presiding over a court of judicature, amidst the parliament. But he was not the less determined to set out in the evening, and in spite of all persuasions he insisted on holding this review, hoping, by this vigorous opposition, to overpower the malady that had assailed him.

The review being ended, the guards alone began their march—the musketeers being to set out only with the king—a delay which gave Porthos an opportunity of displaying his superb equipage in the Rue aux Ours.

The attorney's wife saw him passing by in his new uniform and on his splendid horse. And she loved Porthos too well to let him leave her thus, so she beckoned him to dismount and enter. Porthos was magnificent; his spurs rattled, his cuirass beamed, and his sword smote clashing against his legs. The clerks had no disposition to laugh this time—the musketeer looked too much like one who would soon slit their ears.

The visitor was introduced to M. Coquenard, whose little gray eyes glistened with rage when he beheld his pretended cousin so showily adorned. Nevertheless, he had one source of inward consolation. It was everywhere reported that the campaign would be a rough one, and he gently hoped, at the bottom of his heart, that Porthos might be amongst the slain.

Porthos presented his compliments to Master Coquenard and took his leave. The attorney wished him all sorts of prosperity. As to Madame Coquenard, she was unable to restrain her tears, but no scandalous thoughts could be suggested by her grief; she was known to be strongly attached to her relations, on whose account she

had always had the bitterest contentions with her husband.

Whilst the attorney's wife was able to follow her handsome cousin with her eyes she waved a handkerchief and leaned herself from the window as though she was about to tumble into the street. Porthos received all these indications of tenderness like a man accustomed to such demonstrations. But as he turned the corner of the street he raised his hat and waved it in token of adieu.

Aramis, on his part, wrote a long letter. To whom? None knew. In the next room Kitty, who was to set off that very evening for Tours, was waiting for this mysterious epistle.

Athos drank, sip by sip, the last bottle of his Spanish wine.

In the meantime D'Artagnan was marching with his company. In passing through the Faubourg St. Antoine he turned and looked gayly at the Bastile, which he had at least as yet escaped. As he was gazing only at the Bastile he did not see her ladyship, who, mounted on a dun horse, pointed him out with her finger to two ill-looking men, who immediately came close to the ranks to reconnoiter him. To an interrogation which they addressed to the lady by a look, she answered by a sign that he was indeed the man. Then, certain that there could be no mistake in the execution of her orders, she spurred her horse and disappeared.

The two men followed the company, and at the end of the Faubourg St. Antoine they mounted two horses which a servant out of livery was holding in readiness for them.

CHAPTER XLI.

THE SIEGE OF LA ROCHELLE.

THE siege of La Rochelle was one of the greatest events of the reign of Louis XIII.

The political views of the cardinal, when he undertook

the siege, were extensive. Of the important cities which had been given by Henry IV. to the Huguenots as places of safety, La Rochelle alone remained. The cardinal wished to destroy this last bulwark of Calvinism.

La Rochelle, which had derived additional importance from the ruin of the other Calvinistic towns, was, besides, the last port that remained open to the English in the kingdom of France; and by closing it to England—our eternal enemy—the cardinal would end the work of Joan of Arc and of the Duke of Guise.

Thus it was that Bassompierre, who was at the same time both Protestant and Catholic—a Protestant from conviction and a Catholic as commander of the Saint Esprit—Bassompierre, who was a German by birth and a Frenchman at heart—Bassompierre, who had a particular command at the siege of La Rochelle—said, on charging at the head of many other Protestant noblemen like himself, "You will see, gentlemen, that we shall be fools enough to take La Rochelle."

And Bassompierre was right. The cannonades of the Isle of Ré were a prelude to the dragoonings of the Cévennes; the taking of La Rochelle was the preface to the Edict of Nantes.

But by the side of these general views of the leveling and simplifying minister, which belong to history, the chronicler is obliged to dwell upon the petty objects of the lover and the jealous rival.

Richelieu, as every one knows, had been enamored of the queen. Had this love a purely political aim, or was it one of those profound passions with which Anne of Austria inspired those who were around her? This is what we cannot satisfactorily decide. Yet, at all events, it has been seen, by the circumstances which have been detailed in this history, that Buckingham had gained a superiority over him in more ways than one; and that especially in the affair of the diamond studs—thanks to the devotion of the three musketeers and the courage of D'Artagnan—he had most cruelly mystified and befooled him.

It was Richelieu's object, therefore, not merely to rid France of an enemy, but to revenge himself on a rival. The revenge ought, too, to be stern and signal, and completely worthy of the man who held in his hand, as a weapon, the forces of a whole realm.

Richelieu knew that in fighting against England he was fighting against Buckingham; in triumphing over England he would triumph over Buckingham; and, lastly, that in humiliating England in the eyes of all Europe he would humiliate Buckingham in the eyes of the queen.

On his part, Buckingham, whilst he was putting the honor of England prominently forward as his motive, was impelled by interests exactly similar to those of the cardinal.

Buckingham was also pursuing a private revenge. Under no pretext had Buckingham been able to enter France as an ambassador; and he wished, therefore, to come in as a conqueror. It follows from this that the true stake in this game which two powerful kingdoms were playing for the pleasure of two men in love, was nothing more than a gentle glance from Anne of Austria.

The Duke of Buckingham gained the first advantage. Arriving unexpectedly before the Isle of Ré with ninety vessels and twenty thousand men, he surprised the Count de Toirac, who was the king's commander there, and after a bloody contest accomplished a disembarkation.

Let us record, by the way, that the Baron de Chantal fell in this combat, leaving an orphan daughter, a little girl eighteen months old. This little girl was afterward Madame de Sévigné.

The Count de Toirac returned to the citadel of St. Martin with his garrison and threw a hundred men into a small fort, which was called the fort of La Prée.

This event hastened the decision of the cardinal, and until he and the king could go and take the command of the siege of La Rochelle, which was resolved on, he had sent his majesty's brother on forward to direct the first operations, and had made all the troops he could dispose of march to the theatre of war.

It was of this detachment of the army, which was sent forward as a vanguard, that our friend D'Artagnan formed a part. The king, as we have said, was to follow when his court of justice had been held. On rising from the sitting, on the twenty-third of June, he had found himself seized with fever. He nevertheless persisted on setting out, but getting worse, he was obliged to stop at Villeroi.

Now where the king stopped there also stopped the musketeers. Hence it followed that D'Artagnan, who was only in the guards, found himself separated, for a time at least, from his good friends, Athos, Porthos and Aramis. This separation, which was merely annoying to him at the time, would certainly have become a source of serious anxiety had he been able to discern by what unsuspected dangers he was surrounded.

Nevertheless he arrived without accident at the camp before La Rochelle.

Everything was in *statu quo*. The Duke of Buckingham and the English in possession of the Isle of Ré continued to besiege, but without success, the fort of La Prée and the citadel of St. Martin ; and the hostilities with La Rochelle had commenced two or three days before, on account of a battery which the Duke d'Angoulême had just constructed near the city.

The guards under M. des Essarts were stationed at the Minimes.

But we know that D'Artagnan, engrossed by the ambition of becoming a musketeer, had formed but few intimacies with his comrades, and he found himself, therefore, isolated and abandoned to his own reflections.

And these thoughts were not cheerful. During the year that he had been in Paris he had engaged himself in public affairs and consequently his own private affairs, either of love or fortune, had made no great advances.

As to love, the only woman for whom he had a sincere affection was Madame Bonancieux, and Madame Bonancieux had disappeared, nor with all his efforts had he been able to discover what had become of her.

As to fortune, he—a mere nobody—had made an enemy of the cardinal; that is to say, of a man before whom the nobles of the kingdom trembled and even the king himself stood abashed.

That man had power to crush him and yet had abstained.

To a mind as clear-sighted as D'Artagnan's this forbearance was a gleam of dawn which gave promise of a fairer future.

Then he had made himself another enemy, less to be dreaded, as he thought, but one whom he felt instinctively was not to be despised. This enemy was her ladyship.

In exchange for all this he had the protection and good-will of the queen; but her majesty's good-will, in the circumstances of the times, was only an additional source of persecution, and her protection, it is known, protected very insecurely—witness Chalais and Madame Bonancieux.

So that what he had most manifestly gained, on the whole, was the diamond, worth five or six thousand francs, which he wore upon his finger; and even this diamond, supposing that he must preserve it, to remind the queen at some future day of her gratitude, had not, in the meantime, since he could not dispose of it, any greater value than the pebbles he trampled beneath his feet. We say the pebbles that he trampled beneath his feet, for D'Artagnan made these reflections whilst he was walking all alone in a pretty little path which led from the camp to an adjoining village. But these reflections had led him further than he intended, and the day was beginning to decline when, by the last ray of the setting sun, he seemed to perceive the barrel of a musket glittering behind a hedge.

D'Artagnan had a quick eye and a ready wit. He comprehended that the musket had not come there of itself and that the man who held it was not concealed behind a hedge with any amicable intentions. He determined, therefore, to gain the open country; but on the other side of the road, behind a rock, he perceived the

extremity of a second musket. It was evidently an ambuscade.

The young man gave a glance at the first musket and beheld with some anxiety that it was aiming in his direction, but as soon as he saw the orifice of the barrel motionless he threw himself upon his face. At that instant the shot was fired and he heard the whistling of a ball as it passed over his head.

There was not a single instant to be lost. D'Artagnan raised himself up at a bound and at the same moment a bullet from the second musket scattered the stones in the very part of the path where he had thrown himself down.

D'Artagnan was not one of these foolishly brave men who seek a ridiculous death in order to have it said of them that they never retreated a step. Besides, courage had nothing to do with the matter here; he had fallen into an ambuscade.

"If there is a third shot," said he to himself, "I am a dead man."

He immediately scampered toward the camp with all the swiftness of his countrymen, who are so famous for their activity, but fast as was his course, the one who had fired first, having had time to reload his gun, made another shot at him, so well directed this time that the ball passed through his hat and lifted it ten paces before his flying feet.

As D'Artagnan had not another hat he picked it up as he ran, and reaching his lodging, pale and out of breath, he sat down without speaking to any one and began to reflect.

This event might have three causes. The first and most natural was, that it might be an ambuscade from La Rochelle, whose inmates would not have been sorry to kill one of his majesty's guards, as it would make one enemy the less and that enemy might have a well filled purse in his pocket.

D'Artagnan took his hat and examined the hole that the bullet had made and shook his head. The bullet did not belong to a musket, but to an arquebuse; the

precision of the aim had already made him think it was fired by a private hand; so it was not a military ambuscade, since the ball was not of that calibre.

It *might* be an affectionate memento from the cardinal. It may be remembered that at the very moment when, thanks to the ever blessed beam of sunshine, he had perceived the gun-barrel, he was marveling at the long-suffering of his eminence toward him. But D'Artagnan shook his head with an air of doubt. The cardinal seldom had recourse to such means with people whom a flourish of his pen could crush.

It might be her ladyship's revenge.

This conjecture was more reasonable.

He tried in vain to recall either the features or the dress of the assassins, but he had hurried from them too rapidly to have leisure to remark them.

"Ah, my poor friends," muttered D'Artagnan, "where are you? Alas! how much I miss you!"

D'Artagnan passed a very bad night. Three or four times he awoke with a start, fancying that a man approached his bed to stab him. Yet the day dawned without any accident having occurred during the darkness.

But D'Artagnan suspected that what is deferred is not therefore an impossibility.

He remained in his quarters throughout the whole day, and gave as an excuse to himself, the badness of the weather.

At nine o'clock the next morning they beat to arms. The Duc d'Orléans was visiting the posts. The guards mustered and D'Artagnan took his place amidst his comrades.

His royal highness passed in front of the line, and then all the superior officers approached to pay their respects to him. M. des Essarts, the captain of the guards, went with the others.

After a short time D'Artagnan thought that he perceived M. des Essarts making a sign to him to draw near. He waited for another gesture, fearing that he

night have been mistaken, but on its being repeated he eft the ranks and advanced to receive the order.

" His royal highness is about to ask for volunteers or a dangerous expedition which will be very glorious or those who survive it ; and I made you a sign, that you might hold yourself in readiness."

" Thank you, captain," replied D'Artagnan, who required nothing better than to distinguish himself before he eyes of the lieutenant-general.

The Rochellais had, in fact, made a sortie during the night and recaptured a bastion which the royal army had seized two days before. The point was to push a forlorn hope so forward as to be able to discover in what manner the enemy guarded this bastion.

After a few minutes his royal highness raised his voice and said :

" I want three or four volunteers for this expedition, led by a man who can be depended upon."

" As for your trustworthy man, here he is," said M. les Essarts, pointing to D'Artagnan ; " and as for the four or five volunteers, your royal highness has only to make your wishes known and the men will not be wanting."

" Four volunteers to come and be killed with me ! " cried D'Artagnan, raising his sword.

Two of his companions in the guards rushed toward him instantaneously, and two soldiers having joined him, the number was complete. D'Artagnan, therefore, rejected all others, to avoid injustice to those who had the prior claim.

It was not known whether the Rochellais, after having taken the bastion, had evacuated or placed a garrison in it. It was therefore necessary to examine the spot sufficiently close to ascertain this point.

D'Artagnan went off with his four companions in the line of the trench. The two guards marched by his side and the two soldiers in the rear.

Sheltering themselves in this manner by the rampart, they arrived within a hundred paces of the bastion, and

on turning around at that moment D'Artagnan perceived that the two soldiers had disappeared. Believing them to have remained behind from fear, he continued to advance.

At the turn of the counterscarp they found themselves about sixty yards from the bastion, but they saw no one and the bastion seemed abandoned.

The three volunteers deliberated whether they should advance further, when suddenly a circle of smoke surrounded the vast stone and a dozen balls whistled around D'Artagnan and his companions.

They knew now what they had come to learn—the bastion was guarded; a longer delay, therefore, in so dangerous a place, would have been only a gratuitous imprudence. So D'Artagnan and the two guards turned their heads and began a retreat which was very much like a flight.

On reaching the angle of the trench, which would serve as a rampart to them, one of the guards fell with a ball through his chest, whilst the other, who was safe and sound, made the best of his way to the camp.

D'Artagnan would not thus abandon a companion and leaned over him to lift him up and aid him to regain the lines, but at that very moment two shots were fired; one ball shattered the head of the man who was already wounded, and the other was flattened against a rock, after having passed within two inches of D'Artagnan's body.

The musketeer turned instantly, for this attack could not come from the bastion, which was hidden by the angle of the trench. The remembrance of the two soldiers who had abandoned him occurred to his mind and suggested to him his assassins of the previous evening. He resolved on this occasion to find out what it meant, and fell, therefore, upon the body of his comrade as though he had been dead. He immediately saw that two heads were raised above an abandoned work, which was about thirty yards from him; they were those of the two soldiers. D'Artagnan was not mistaken: these

men had followed him solely for the purpose of assassinating him, in the full belief that the murder of the young man would be imputed to the muskets of the enemy.

But as he might be only wounded and might denounce their crime, they drew near to complete their work. Happily, deceived by the sight of D'Artagnan's position, they neglected to reload their guns. When they were about three paces from him, D'Artagnan, who had taken special care, in falling, not to relinquish his sword, suddenly arose and sprang beside them.

The assassins were well aware that, if they fled toward the camp without having killed their man, they should be accused by him, and therefore their first impulse was to pass over to the enemy. One of them took his gun by the barrel and made use of it as a club; he dealt a terrible blow at D'Artagnan, who avoided it by jumping aside; by this movement, however, he opened a passage for the bandit, who immediately sprang forth toward the bastion. But as the Rochellais who guarded it were ignorant of his intentions in advancing, they fired upon him, and he fell, with his shoulder broken by a ball.

In the meantime D'Artagnan threw himself on the second soldier with his sword. The struggle was not long. This wretch had only his discharged fusee to defend himself with. The sword of the guardsman glided along the barrel of this useless weapon, and passed through the assassin's thigh. As soon as he had fallen D'Artagnan applied the point of his weapon to his throat.

"Oh, do not kill me!" exclaimed the bandit. "Pardon, pardon, sir, and I will confess everything!"

"Is it worth my while to grant you your life for your secret?" demanded the young man.

"Yes, if you consider life of any value to a man of twenty-two years of age, who, being as handsome and as brave as you are, may accomplish anything."

"Wretch!" cried D'Artagnan, "speak instantly! Who employed you to assassinate me?"

"A woman whom I do not know, but who was called Milady."

"But if you do not know this woman, how came you to know her name?"

"My comrade knew her and called her thus. It was with him that she arranged the business—not with me. He has a letter from this person now in his pocket which would be of great importance to you, according to what I heard him say."

"But how came you to be his partner in this ambuscade?"

"He proposed to me to join him in it and I agreed."

"And how much has she paid you for this enchanting expedition?"

"A hundred louis."

"Well, upon my word," said the young man, laughing, "she thinks me of some value. A hundred louis! It is quite a fortune for two wretches like you. I can well understand that you would accept it, and so I forgive you, but on one condition."

"What is that?" said the soldier, uneasy at discovering that all was not yet ended.

"That you go and get me the letter out of your companion's pocket."

"But," exclaimed the bandit, "that is only another way of killing me. How can you ask me to go for the letter under the very fire of the bastion?"

"But you must make up your mind to go for it, or I swear that you shall this moment die by my sword."

"Mercy, sir! mercy, in the name of the young lady whom you love and whom perhaps you imagine dead, but who is not so!" screamed the bandit, throwing himself on his hand, for his strength was ebbing with his blood.

"And how do you know that there is a young lady whom I love and that I have believed her dead?" demanded D'Artagnan.

"By that letter in my comrade's pocket."

"You see, then, that I must have that letter," said D'Artagnan. "So let us have no longer delay, no more hesitation, or, whatever may be my repugnance to bathe

my sword a second time in the blood of such a villain as yourself, I swear to you, on the word of an honest man——"

At these words D'Artagnan made such a threatening gesture that the wounded man arose.

"Stop! stop!" exclaimed he, recovering courage through the very force of fear; "I go! I go!"

D'Artagnan took the soldier's arquebuse, made him walk in front, and urged him at the same time toward his companion, by pricking him in the loins with the point of his sword.

It was a fearful spectacle to witness this unhappy being leaving a long track of blood upon the path he took, growing pale from the approach of death, and yet striving to drag himself without being seen to the body of his accomplice, which was stretched out at a distance of twenty yards.

Terror was so depicted on his countenance, which was covered with an icy dampness, that D'Artagnan both pitied and despised him.

"Come!" said he, "I will show you the difference between a man of courage and a coward! Wait where you are—I will go!" And with an active step and his eye upon the bastion, observing the proceedings of the enemy and availing himself of every inequality of ground, he managed to reach the fallen soldier.

There were two methods of accomplishing his purpose: either to search him where he was, or to carry him away, making a buckler of his body, and then to search him in the trench.

D'Artagnan preferred the second plan and had thrown the body of the assassin on his shoulders just at the very moment that the enemy fired.

A slight tremor, a final cry and a shudder of agony proved to D'Artagnan that he who had sought to assassinate him had now saved his life.

D'Artagnan reached the trench and threw the body by the side of the wounded man, who was as pale now as the dead one.

He then began to take the inventory. There was a leathern pocket-book, a purse, which evidently contained a part of the blood-money the banditti had received, and a dice-box and dice; and these composed the inheritance of the dead man.

He left the dice-box and dice where they had fallen, threw the purse to the wounded man, and eagerly opened the pocket-book.

Amongst several unimportant papers he found the following letter: it was that which he had gone to search for at the hazard of his life:

"Since you have lost track of that woman and she is now in safety in the convent, which you never ought to have allowed her to reach, take care at any rate not to miss *the man;* otherwise you know that I have a long arm and you shall pay dearly for the hundred louis which you have of mine."

There was no signature.

Nevertheless, it was evident the letter was from Milady.

He kept it, therefore, as a testimony against her; and finding himself in safety behind the angle of the trench, he began to question the wounded man. The latter confessed that he had been engaged with his comrade, the same who had now been killed, to carry off a young woman, who was to leave Paris by the barrier of La Vilette; but that having stopped to drink at a wine-shop, they had been ten minutes too late for the carriage.

"But what were you to have done with this woman?" demanded D'Artagnan, in an agony.

"We were to have taken her to a hotel in the Place Royale," said the wounded man.

"Yes, yes," muttered D'Artagnan, "that is it: to her ladyship herself."

The young man shuddered as he comprehended with how atrocious a lust for vengeance this woman was im-

pelled to destroy him and those who loved him; and how well she was acquainted with the secrets of the court, since she had detected even this. For this exact information she was indebted to the cardinal.

But as some degree of compensation, he ascertained with unfeigned joy that the queen had at last discovered the prison to which Madame Bonancieux had been sent to expiate her devotedness and had already rescued her from it. Thus the letter which he had received from the young woman and her appearance in the carriage on the Chaillot road were explained to him.

Thenceforth, as Athos had predicted, it was possible to find Madame Bonancieux again, and a convent was not impregnable.

This idea disposed his heart to clemency. He turned toward the wounded man, who was glaring at every change of his countenance with agony, and stretching out his arm to him:

"Come," said he, "I will not abandon you here. Rest on me and let us return to the camp."

"Yes," said the wounded man, who could hardly credit so much magnanimity; "but is it not to have me hanged?"

"You have my word," replied he; "for the second time I grant you your life."

The wounded man fell on his knees and kissed the feet of his preserver; but D'Artagnan, who had no longer any motive for remaining so near the enemy himself, cut short these tokens of his gratitude.

The guard who had returned at the first discharge from the bastion had announced the death of his four companions. There was, therefore, both great astonishment and great joy in the regiment when they saw the young man returning safe and sound.

D'Artagnan explained the sword-wound of his companion by a sortie, which he invented. He recounted the death of the other soldier and the perils they had run. This account was the occasion of a genuine triumph. For one day the whole army spoke of this expedition,

and his royal highness himself sent to compliment our musketeer upon his gallant conduct.

And lastly, as every good action brings its recompense with it, that of D'Artagnan had the happy result of restoring to him the tranquillity that he had lost. In fact, the young man thought that he might cease to be disturbed, since of his two enemies, one was killed and the other devoted to his interests.

This tranquillity, however, proved one thing—that D'Artagnan did not yet thoroughly know Milady.

CHAPTER XLII.

THE WINE OF ANJOU.

After almost hopeless accounts of the king, the report of his recovery began to spread through the camp; and as he was in great haste to reach the siege in person it was said that he would set out as soon as he could mount his horse.

In the meantime his royal highness—who knew that he would soon be superseded, either by the Duc d'Angoulême or by Bassompierre or by Schomberg, who were disputing with one another for the command—did but little, lost his time in petty attacks and dared not hazard any great enterprise to drive the English from the Isle of Ré, where they besieged the citadel of St. Martin and the Fort de la Prée; whilst the French on their side were besieging La Rochelle.

D'Artagnan, as we have said, had become now easy in his mind, as always happens after a danger past when danger seems to have entirely vanished.

Yet one anxiety still remained to him, which was, that he received no tidings of his friends.

But one morning explanation reached him in the shape of the following letter, dated from Villeroi:

"M. D'ARTAGNAN,—Messieurs Athos, Porthos, and Aramis, after having had a capital dinner party at my house and enjoyed themselves very much, made so great a noise that the provost of the castle, who is a strict disciplinarian, put them in confinement for a few days. I must, nevertheless, execute the orders that they gave me, to send you a dozen bottles of my Anjou wine, which they greatly admired. They hope that you will drink to their healths in their own favorite wine.

"I have done this, and am, sir, with great respect, your most obedient, humble servant, GODEAU,

"The host of Messieurs the Musketeers."

"Good!" exclaimed D'Artagnan, "they think of me amidst their pleasures, as I have thought of them in my weariness. Sure enough I will drink to them, and with all my heart, too, but not alone."

And D'Artagnan hastened to the quarters of the two guards with whom he had become more intimate than with any of the others, to invite them to come and drink some of the delicious wine of Anjou, which had just arrived from Villeroi.

One of the two guards was to be on duty in the evening, and the other on the morrow; so the meeting was arranged for the day after.

D'Artagnan sent his dozen of wine to the mess-room of the guards, desiring to have it kept with care, and on the day of the entertainment, as the dinner was fixed for twelve o'clock, he sent Planchet at nine to get everything prepared.

Planchet, elated at this exaltation to the dignity of butler, determined to perform his duties like an intelligent man. To effect this he called in the aid of the valet of one of his master's guests, by name Fourneau, and also that of the pretended soldier who had sought to slay our hero and who, belonging to no regiment, had, since the Gascon spared his life, entered into D'Artagnan's service, or rather, into Planchet's.

The appointed dinner hour being come, the two guests

arrived and took their places and the dishes were arranged upon the table. Planchet waited with a napkin on his arm; Fourneau uncorked the bottles, and Brisemont, for that was the convalescent's name, decanted the wine, which seemed to have been somewhat disturbed by the shaking of the journey. The first bottle being slightly thick toward the bottom, Brisemont poured the last of it into a wine-glass and D'Artagnan permitted him to drink it, as the poor wretch was still very weak.

The guests, having finished their soup, were just carrying the first glass of wine to their lips, when suddenly the cannon sounded from Fort Louis and Fort Neuf. The guards, thinking there was some unexpected attack, either from the besieged or from the English, immediately seized their swords; D'Artagnan did the same and the three hastened out toward their posts.

But scarcely were they out of the mess-room before they found the reason of this great noise. Cries of "Long live the king!" "Long live the cardinal!" re-echoed on every side and drums were beating in all directions.

In fact, the king in his impatience, had taken such measures that he had at that moment arrived with a reinforcement of ten thousand men. His musketeers preceded and followed him. D'Artagnan, placed in line with his company, with an expressive gesture saluted his friends and M. de Treville, who recognized him immediately.

The ceremony of reception being ended, the four friends were soon united.

"Egad!" exclaimed D'Artagnan, "you could not have arrived in better time; the dinner will not have had even time to get cold. Is it not so, gentlemen?" added the young man, turning to the two guards, whom he presented to his friends.

"Ah! ah!" said Porthos, "it appears that you were feasting."

"I hope," said Aramis, "that there are no ladies at your dinner."

"Is there anything that is drinkable in this paltry place?" said Athos.

"Why, zounds! there is your own wine, my dear friend," answered D'Artagnan.

"*Our* wine?" said Athos, in astonishment.

"Yes, that which you sent me."

"Wine that we sent you?"

"Yes, you know very well—that wine from the hills of Anjou."

"I know that wine you are talking of——"

"Your favorite wine——"

"Ay, when I have neither champagne nor chambertin."

"Well, in the absence of champagne and chambertin, you must be content with that."

"And so we, high-livers as we are, have sent you some wine, have we?" said Porthos.

"No, but it is the wine which was sent me by your orders."

"By our orders?" said the musketeers.

"Did you send the wine, Aramis?" inquired Athos.

"No; did you, Porthos?"

"No; did you, Athos?"

"No."

"If it was not you," said D'Artagnan, "it was your host."

"Our host?"

"Yes, your host—Godeau at Villeroi."

"Faith, let come from whom it may, no matter!" said Porthos. "Let us taste it, and if good, let us drink it."

"No," said Athos, "let us not drink wine without in the least knowing whence it comes."

"You are right, Athos," said D'Artagnan. "Did none of you direct the host, Godeau, to send me the wine?"

"No; and yet he sent you some in our names?"

"Here is the letter," said D'Artagnan, and he presented the letter to his companions.

"It is not his writing," said Athos; "I know it, for it was I who, before we left, settled our joint account."

"A forged letter!" said Porthos, indignantly; "we have not been in prison."

"D'Artagnan," said Aramis, in a tone of reproach, "how could you believe that we had become obstreperous?"

D'Artagnan grew suddenly pale and a convulsive trembling shook his limbs.

"You frighten me," said Athos; "what can have occurred?"

"Let us run, my friends, let us run," said D'Artagnan; "a horrible suspicion comes across my mind. Can this, too, be another of that woman's acts of vengeance?"

It was now Athos who, in his turn, grew pale.

D'Artagnan sprang toward the mess-room, followed by the three musketeers and the two guards.

The first object which struck D'Artagnan's sight on entering the room was Brisemont, extended on the floor, writhing in horrible convulsions. Planchet and Fourneau, looking as pale as corpses, were endeavoring to assist him, but it was evident all aid was useless; the features of the dying man were contracted from agony.

"Ah!" cried he, when he perceived D'Artagnan, "you pretended to forgive and now you poison me!"

"I, wretched man, I!" exclaimed the young man, "what can you mean?"

"I say that it is you who gave me the wine and it is you who told me to drink it. You wanted to take your revenge—oh, it is too dreadful!"

"Do not think so, Brisemont," said D'Artagnan, "for I swear——"

"Oh! but God is there—God will punish you! My God! may you one day suffer what I suffer now!"

"Upon the gospel," cried D'Artagnan, rushing toward the dying man, "I swear that I knew not that this wine was poisoned, and that I was about to drink it as well as yourself."

"I do not believe you!" exclaimed the soldier, and he expired in terrific tortures.

"Horrible! horrible!" muttered Athos, whilst Porthos broke the bottles and Aramis—rather late, it must be confessed—sent off for a confessor.

"Oh, my friends," said D'Artagnan, "you have once more saved my life, and not mine only, but the lives of these gentlemen also. Gentlemen," continued he, addressing the guards, "may I request your silence concerning this adventure? Persons of high condition may be implicated in what you have now seen and the misery of it all would fall upon us."

"Ah, sir!" stammered out Planchet, more dead than alive; "ah, sir, what a narrow escape I have had!"

"What, you rascal!" cried D'Artagnan, "were you going to drink my wine?"

"To the king's health, sir, I was going to drink one little glass if Fourneau had not said that some one called me."

"Alas!" said Fourneau, whose teeth were chattering with fright, "I wanted to get rid of him that I might drink some myself."

"Gentlemen," said D'Artagnan, addressing the guards, "you must be sensible that our entertainment would be but a melancholy affair after what has passed. I beseech you, therefore, to receive my excuses and let us postpone it till some other day."

The two guards courteously accepted these apologies, and understanding that the four friends wished to be alone, they took their leave.

When the young guard and the three musketeers were by themselves they looked at one another for an instant in a way that proved how well they understood the seriousness of their situation.

"First," said Athos, "let us leave this room; a dead man is but sorry company."

"Planchet," said D'Artagnan, "I recommend you to look to the body of this poor devil and see that it is buried in consecrated ground. He committed an awful crime it is true, but he had repented of it."

Having intrusted the funeral rites of Brisemont to

Planchet and Fourneau, the four friends quitted the room.

The host gave them another chamber and furnished them with eggs, while Athos himself fetched water for them from the fountain. Aramis and Porthos were in a few words informed of all that had occurred.

"Well!" said D'Artagnan to Athos, "you see, my dear friend, it is war to the death!"

Athos shook his head. "Yes, yes," said he; "I see it well enough; but are you sure that it is she?"

"I am quite sure."

"Nevertheless, I confess that I have still some doubts."

"But that fleur-de-lis upon the shoulder?"

"It is an Englishwoman who has committed some crime in France and has been branded in consequence."

"Athos, it is your wife, I tell you," repeated D'Artagnan. "Do you not remember how the two marks agree?"

"And yet I should have *thought* that *she* was dead, I so completely hanged her!"

It was D'Artagnan who shook his head this time.

"But after all, what is to be done?" said the young man.

"The fact is, that it is impossible to remain in this manner, with a sword always suspended over one's head," replied Athos; "and you must get free from such a situation."

"But how?"

"Listen: try to find her and to come to some understanding with her. Say to her,—"Peace or war? On the honor of a gentleman I will never say one word or take one step to injure you. On your part give me a solemn oath to remain neutral with respect to me. If not, I will go to the chancellor, to the king and to the executioner; I will excite the court against you and will declare you branded; I will cause you to be tried; and, if you are acquitted—well, then, on the word of a gentleman, I will kill you myself, as I would a mad dog.'"

"I like this plan well enough," said D'Artagnan, "but how am I to find her?"

"Time, my dear friend, time brings opportunity; opportunity is man's special providence. The more a man has embarked, the more he gains, when he knows how to wait."

"Yes, but to wait, surrounded by assassins and poisoners."

"Bah!" said Athos; "God has preserved you hitherto and He will, probably, condescend to preserve you still."

"Yes. Besides, we are men, and, after all, it is our business to risk our lives; but she?" added D'Artagnan, in a low voice.

"And who is she?" asked Athos.

"Constance."

"Madame Bonancieux? Ah! it is true," said Athos. "Poor fellow! I forgot you were in love."

"Well," said Aramis, "but did you not see by the very letter that you found on the wretch who was killed that she was in a convent? One is quite safe in a convent; and as soon as the siege of La Rochelle is ended, I promise you, on my part——"

"Good!" said Athos, "good! Yes, my dear Aramis, we know that your views all tend toward religion."

"I am only a musketeer in the meantime," said Aramis, meekly.

"It would seem that he has not heard from his mistress for a long while," said Athos, in a whisper, to D'Artagnan; "but don't say anything—we are certain of it."

"Well," said Porthos, "it seems to me there is a very simple way."

"And what is that?" demanded D'Artagnan.

"She is in a convent, you say?" continued Porthos.

"Yes."

"Well, as soon as the siege is raised, we will get her out of this convent."

"But first we must know what convent she is in."

"Ah, that is true," said Porthos.

"But do you not say, my dear D'Artagnan," said

Athos, "that it is the queen who chose this convent for her?"

"Yes. I believe so, at least."

"Well, then, Porthos will help us in that case."

"How so, pray?"

"Why, through your marchioness, or duchess, or princess; she ought to have a long arm."

"Hush!" said Porthos, putting his fingers on his lips; "I fancy she is a cardinalist, and she must know nothing about it."

"Then," said Aramis, "*I* will undertake to get some intelligence of her."

"You, Aramis?" exclaimed the three friends; "you —and how so?"

"Through the queen's almoner, with whom I am intimate," answered Aramis, blushing.

On this assurance the four friends, who had ended their simple repast, separated, with the promise of meeting again the same evening. D'Artagnan returned to the Minimes and the three musketeers went to the king's quarters, where they had still to provide themselves with lodgings.

CHAPTER XLIII.

AT THE SIGN OF THE RED DOVE-COTE.

ALMOST as soon as he had reached the camp, the king —who was in great haste to confront the enemy, and who participated in the cardinal's hatred of Buckingham—wished to complete the preparations, first for driving the English from the Isle of Ré, and then for pressing on the siege of La Rochelle. But in spite of all his efforts he was retarded by the dissensions which broke out between De Bassompierre and Schomberg against the Duke of Angoulême.

Schomberg and De Bassompierre were marshals of France and insisted on their right to command the

army under the superintendence of the king; but the cardinal, apprehensive that Bassompierre, who was a Huguenot at heart, might fight but feebly against the English and the Rochellais, who were his brethren in faith, supported the Duke of Angoulême, whom the king had, at his instigation, already made lieutenant-general. The result was that, with the alternative of seeing Schomberg and De Bassompierre desert the army, they were compelled to give each a separate command. Bassompierre took his station to the north of the city, from La Leu to Dompierre; the Duke of Angoulême took his to the east, from Dompierre to Perigny; and Schomberg to the south, from Perigny to Angoutin.

His royal highness fixed his quarters at Dompierre; the king was sometimes at Estre and sometimes at La Jarrie; and the cardinal established himself at a simple house without any intrenchment, at Pont de la Pierre, upon the downs.

Thus his royal highness overlooked Bassompierre; the king, the Duke of Angoulême; and the cardinal, M. de Schomberg.

As soon as this arrangement had been established they occupied themselves in driving the English from the Island.

The conjuncture was admirable. The English—who, above all things, required to be well fed in order to prove good soldiers—getting now nothing but salted provisions and weevilly biscuits, had many invalids in their camp; and, moreover, the sea, which was at that season of the year highly dangerous on all the western coast, was every day disastrous to some small vessel or other, and the shore, from the point of L'Aiguillon to the trenches, was literally strewed at every tide with the wrecks of pinnaces, cutters and feluccas. The result was that, should the king's troops even keep within their camp, Buckingham, who only remained in the Isle of Ré from obstinacy, would be sooner or later forced to run the gauntlet.

But as M. de Toirac announced that everything was

preparing in the enemy's camp for a new assault, the king concluded on adopting final measures and issued the necessary orders for a decisive affair.

Our intention being not to make a journal of the siege, but merely to record those events in it which bear upon this history, we shall be contented with stating that the enterprise succeeded, to the great satisfaction of the king and the great glory of the cardinal. The English, beaten back foot by foot, vanquished in every encounter, decimated in their passage from the Isle, were compelled to re-embark, leaving on the field of battle two thousand men, amongst whom were five colonels, three lieutenant-colonels, two hundred and fifty captains, and twenty gentlemen of quality, as well as four pieces of cannon and sixty flags, which were conveyed to Paris by Claude de Saint Simon and floated with great pomp from the arched roof of Notre Dame.

Te Deums were sung in the camp and soon spread themselves from thence throughout the whole of France.

The cardinal was thus at liberty to carry on the siege, without having, at least for the time being, any reason to be apprehensive of the English.

But, as we have just hinted, the security was only momentary. An envoy of the Duke of Buckingham, whose name was Montague, having been seized, they found upon him proofs of a league between the Empire, Spain, England and Lorraine. This league was formed against France.

Still further, in Buckingham's quarters, which he had been forced to abandon precipitately, there had been found papers confirming—as the cardinal declares in his memoirs—the existence of this league and compromising greatly Madame de Chevreuse and, consequently, the queen.

It was upon the cardinal that all the responsibility rested, for a man can never be an absolute minister without being responsible. On this account all the resources of his vast genius were exerted by night and day and strained to comprehend the slightest movement that occurred in the great realms of Europe.

The cardinal was well aware of the activity and, above all, of the animosity of Buckingham. If the league which threatened France should triumph, all his influence was lost. The policies of Spain and Austria would have each its representatives in the cabinet at the Louvre, where they had as yet only partisans. He, Richelieu, the French minister, the minister emphatically national, would be ruined; and the king, who, even whilst he was obeying him like a child, disliked him as a child dislikes its master, would abandon him to the united vengeance of his royal highness and the queen. He would be ruined himself, and very likely France along with him; and these were disasters that he was bound to circumvent.

On this account were seen couriers, becoming more numerous every instant, succeeding each other by night and by day, at the small house on the Pont de la Pierre, in which the cardinal had fixed his quarters.

There were monks who wore the habit so ill that it was easy to recognize them as belonging to the church militant; women, a little awkward in their pages' costume, the looseness of whose dresses did not entirely conceal their rounded forms; and countrymen, with blackened hands but fine limbs, who might be known for men of quality at the distance of a league.

Other visitors, too, there were, more dangerous, for it had been two or three times reported that the cardinal had narrowly escaped assassination. It is true that the enemies of his eminence declared that it was he himself who subsidized these unskillful assassins, so that he might on occasion have an ostensible right of retaliation; but we should believe altogether neither what ministers say nor what their enemies aver.

Yet this did not prevent the cardinal, whose most violent detractors never called in question his personal courage, from making many nocturnal expeditions, sometimes to communicate important orders to the Duke of Angoulême, sometimes to hold council with the king, and at others to confer with some messenger whom he did not choose to have admitted at his own abode.

The musketeers, on their part, not having much to occupy them in the siege, were not very strictly controlled and led a merry life. This was the more easy to our three companions, inasmuch as, being friends of M. de Treville, they readily obtained from him special permissions to absent themselves, even after the hour of the evening drum.

Now one night when D'Artagnan, who was in the trenches, could not accompany them, Athos, Porthos and Aramis, mounted on their chargers, enveloped in their uniform cloaks, and with their hands on the butt-ends of their pistols, were returning together from a tavern which Athos had discovered two days before on the La Jarrie road and which was called the Red Dove-cote. They were proceeding on the road toward the camp, keeping a bright lookout for fear of an ambuscade, when, about a quarter of a league from the village of Boisnau, they thought they heard the sound of horses coming toward them. They immediately halted, in close rank, and waited, keeping in the middle of the road. After a short time and just as the moon emerged from behind a cloud, they saw coming round the corner of the road two horsemen, who, upon perceiving them, halted also, appearing to deliberate whether they should advance or retreat. This hesitation excited the suspicion of our three friends, and Athos, advancing a few paces, cried out in his firm voice :

" Who goes there ? "

" Who goes there, yourselves ? " replied one of the horsemen.

" That is no answer ! " exclaimed Athos. " Who goes there ? Answer, or we charge."

" Take care what you are about, gentlemen," said a sonorous voice, which appeared to be accustomed to command.

" It is some officer of rank who is making his night rounds," said Athos, tuning toward his companions. " What will you do, gentlemen ? "

" Who are you ? " said the same voice in the same

commanding tone. "Reply, or you may find yourselves in trouble for your disobedience."

"King's musketeers!" answered Athos, more than ever convinced that he who questioned him had the right to do so.

"Of what company?"

"Company of Treville."

"Advance and give an account of what you are doing here at this time of night."

The three companions advanced, with their ears a little drooping, for they were all now convinced that they had to deal with one more powerful than themselves. They left Athos to be their spokesman.

One of the two horsemen—he who had spoken the second time—was about ten paces from his companion. Athos made a sign to Porthos and Aramis to remain in the same manner in the rear, and advanced alone.

"Excuse me, sir," said Athos, "but we did not know who you were and you may see that we kept a good lookout."

"Your name?" said the officer, who covered part of his face with his cloak.

"But you, yourself, sir," said Athos, who began to be indignant at this questioning, "give me, I beg, some proof that you have the right thus to question me."

"Your name?" said the horseman a second time, letting his cloak fall so that his countenance might be seen.

"The cardinal!" cried the astounded musketeer.

"Your name!" a third time repeated Richelieu.

"Athos," said he.

The cardinal made a sign to his equerry, who approached him.

"These three musketeers will follow us," said he in a low voice; "I do not wish it to be known that I have left the camp, and if they follow us we shall be certain that they will not tell any one."

"We are gentlemen, my lord," said Athos; "ask us for our words and do not be in doubt about us. Thank God, we know how to keep a secret."

The cardinal fixed his piercing eyes upon the bold speaker.

"You have a fine ear, M. Athos," said the cardinal, "but listen to this: it is not through distrust that I request you to follow me, it is for my own security. Undoubtedly your two companions are Messieurs Porthos and Aramis?"

"Yes, your eminence," said Athos, whilst the two musketeers came forward, hat in hand.

"I know you, gentlemen," said the cardinal; "I know you; I am aware that you are not entirely my friends, and I am sorry for it; but I know that you are brave and loyal gentlemen and that you may be safely trusted. M. Athos, do me the honor, therefore, to accompany me with your two friends, and then I shall have an escort which might excite the envy of his majesty, if we should meet him."

The three musketeers bowed to the very necks of their horses.

"Well, then, upon my honor," said Athos, "your eminence is right to take us with you. We have met some fearful faces on the road and we even had a quarrel with four of them at the Red Dove-cote."

"A quarrel! And on what account, gentlemen?" said the cardinal. "I do not like squabbling, you know."

"That is exactly why I have the honor to warn your eminence of what has just happened, for you might hear it from others and from a false report might be induced to believe that we had been in fault."

"And what were the results of this quarrel?" demanded the cardinal, frowning.

"Why, my friend Aramis, there, has received a slight wound in the arm, which, however, as your eminence may see, will not hinder him from mounting the assault to-morrow if your eminence commands the attack."

"But you are not the kind of men to take wounds in that way," said the cardinal. "Come, be frank, gentlemen: you certainly gave some in return; confess your-

selves; you know that I have the right to give absolution."

"I, my lord," said Athos, "did not even draw my sword, but I took him with whom I was engaged up in my arms and threw him out of the window; and," continued Athos, with some slight hesitation, "I fancy that in falling he broke his leg."

"Ah, ah!" said the cardinal; "and you, M. Porthos?"

"I, my lord, knowing that dueling is forbidden, seized a bench and gave one of those brigands a blow which I imagine broke his arm."

"Very good," said the cardinal; "and you, M. Aramis?"

"I, my lord, as I am naturally very gentle, and am, besides, as your eminence perhaps does not know, on the point of taking orders, I wanted to lead away my companions, when one of these wretches treacherously stabbed me through the left arm; my patience then failed me, I drew my sword in turn, and as he returned to the charge I almost think I felt, as he threw himself upon me, that the weapon passed through his body. I only know that he fell and was carried away by his two companions."

"The deuce, gentlemen!" said the cardinal; "three men disabled in a tavern quarrel! You have pretty active hands. But, by the way, what was the cause of the quarrel?"

"These wretches were drunk," said Athos, "and knowing that a lady had arrived at the tavern that evening, they wanted to force her door."

"And was this woman young and pretty?" demanded the cardinal, with some anxiety.

"We did not see her, my lord," replied Athos.

"You did not see her? Ah! very good!" briskly replied the cardinal; "you did right to defend the honor of a woman, and as I am myself going down to the Red Dove-cote, I shall find out whether you have told me the truth."

"My lord," proudly replied Athos, "we are gentlemen and would not tell a lie to save our lives."

"Nor do I doubt what you have told me, M. Athos—I do not doubt it for one moment; but," added he, to change the conversation, "was this lady alone?"

"The lady had a cavalier shut up with her, but as he did not show himself, in spite of the noise, it is to be presumed that he is a coward."

"'Judge not rashly,' says the gospel," replied the cardinal.

Athos bowed.

"And now, gentlemen," said Richelieu, "I know what I wanted; follow me."

The three musketeers fell behind the cardinal, who again covered his face with his cloak and went forward, keeping himself eight or ten paces before his companions.

They soon arrived at the silent, solitary tavern. The landlord was unquestionably aware what an illustrious visitor was expected and had packed off all troublesome persons.

Ten paces before he reached the door the cardinal made a sign to his equerry and to the three musketeers to halt. A ready saddled horse was fastened to the shutter. The cardinal knocked three times in a peculiar manner.

A man enveloped in a cloak came out directly and quickly exchanged a few words with the cardinal, after which he mounted the horse and went off toward Surgères, which was also the road to Paris.

"Come forward, gentlemen," said the cardinal. "I find that you have told me the truth, and it will not be my fault if our meeting this evening should not turn out to your advantage. In the meantime, follow me."

Richelieu dismounted and the three musketeers did the same. The cardinal cast his bridle over the arm of his equerry and the musketeers fastened theirs to the shutters. The landlord stood on the step of his door; to him the cardinal was only an officer coming to visit a lady.

"Have you any chamber on the ground floor where

hese gentlemen may wait for me, by a good fire ? "
nquired the cardinal.

The landlord opened the door of a large room, where a
orry, closed iron stove had lately been replaced by a
rge and excellent chimney.

" How is this ? " replied he.

" That will do very well," said the cardinal. " Enter,
entlemen, and be pleased to wait for me here ; I shall
ot be more than half an hour."

And whilst the three musketeers entered the chamber
n the ground floor, the cardinal, without requiring any
irection, ascended the stairs like a man who has no
eed to be told the way.

CHAPTER XLIV.

THE UTILITY OF STOVE FUNNELS.

r was evident that, without knowing it, and moved
olely by their chivalrous and adventurous character, our
hree friends had rendered a service to some one whom
he cardinal honored with his own special protection.

But who was that some one ? This was the question
hich our three musketeers first asked themselves.
inding that none of the replies which their intelligence
uggested were satisfactory, Porthos called the landlord
nd asked him for some dice.

Porthos and Aramis placed themselves at a table and
egan to play, whilst Athos walked up and down the
oom in deep thought.

As he walked and meditated he passed and repassed
efore the funnel of the former stove, which had been
alf broken off and the other end of which led into the
partment above. Each time that he passed he heard
he murmur of speech, which at last attracted his atten-
ion. Athos approached and distinguished some words
hich certainly appeared to deserve so much attention

that he made signs to his two companions to be still, and remained with his ear bent down to the lower opening of the funnel.

"Listen, Milady," said the cardinal. "The business is important. Sit down and let us talk about it."

"Milady!" muttered Athos.

"I am listening to your eminence with the greatest attention," replied a voice which made him start.

"A small vessel, with an English crew, whose captain is devoted to me, awaits you at the mouth of the Charente, at the Fort de la Pointe; it will sail to-morrow morning."

"I must set out to-night then?"

"Directly; that is to say, as soon as you have received my instructions. Two men, whom you will find at the door when you go out, will escort you. You will let me go first, and then, half an hour after, you will depart yourself."

"Yes, my lord. Now let us return to the commission with which you are pleased to charge me; and as I am anxious to continue to deserve your confidence, begin to explain it, in clear and precise terms, so that I may not make any mistake."

There was a moment of profound silence between the two interlocutors. It was evident that the cardinal was weighing the expressions he was about to use and that the lady was collecting all her intellectual faculties to understand what he was going to say and to engrave it on her memory when it was said.

Athos took advantage of this moment to tell his two companions to fasten the door inside and to beckon them to come and listen with him. The two musketeers, who loved their ease, brought a chair for each of themselves and one for Athos. They all three seated themselves with their heads close together and their ears wide open.

"You are going to London," resumed the cardinal "on your arrival there you will seek out Buckingham."

"I would observe to your eminence," said her ladyship, "that since the affair of the diamond studs, in

which the duke has always suspected me, his grace mistrusts me more than ever."

"But you have no occasion, this time," said the cardinal, "to gain his confidence; you are to present yourself frankly and loyally, as a negotiatress."

"Frankly and loyally!" repeated the lady, with an indescribable expression of duplicity.

"Yes, frankly and loyally," replied the cardinal, in the same tone; "all this business must be transacted openly."

"I will follow your eminence's instructions to the very letter and I wait for you to give them."

"You will go to Buckingham from *me* and you will tell him that I am aware of all the preparations he is making, but that I do not much disquiet myself about them, seeing that, at the very first step he ventures on, I will ruin the queen."

"Will he believe that your eminence is in a condition to execute your threats?"

"Yes, for I am in possession of proofs."

"It will be necessary for me to be able to submit these proofs for his examination."

"Certainly; you will say to him, first, that I will publish the report of Bois-Robert and of the Marquis de Beautru, concerning the interview which the duke had with the queen on the evening that the constable's lady gave a masked ball; and you will add, in order to leave him no room for doubt, that he came in the costume of the Great Mogul, which was to have been worn by the Duke of Guise and which he bought of this latter for the sum of three thousand pistoles."

"Good, my lord!"

"All the details of his entry in the Louvre, where he introduced himself in the character of an Italian fortune-teller, and of his leaving in the middle of the night, are known to me; and you will tell him, in order that he may again be assured of the accuracy of my information, that he had under his cloak a large white robe, thickly covered with tears and deaths' heads and cross-bones.

in which, in case of surprise, he was to personate the phantom of the White Lady, who, as is well known, revisits the Louvre whenever any great event is about to be accomplished."

"Is that all, my lord?"

"Tell him that I know all particulars of the adventure at Amiens and that I shall make a little wittily turned romance of it, with a plan of the garden and the portraits of the principal actors in that nocturnal scene."

"I will tell him this."

"Tell him, also, that I have Montague in the Bastile; it is true we found no letter on him, but the torture may make him tell all he knows,—and even a little more."

"Admirable!"

"And lastly, add that his grace, in his hurry to leave the Isle of Ré, forgot to put in his pocket a certain letter of Madame de Chevreuse, which strangely compromises the queen, inasmuch as it proves not only that her majesty is capable of loving the enemies of the king, but also that she is actually conspiring with the enemies of France. You now thoroughly comprehend all that I have told you, do you not?"

"Your eminence shall judge—the high constable's lady's ball, the night at the Louvre, the evening at Amiens, the arrest of Montague, and the letter of Madame de Chevreuse."

"That is right, my lady, that is right; you have an excellent memory."

"But," resumed she to whom the cardinal had just addressed this compliment, "if in spite of all these reasons the duke should not yield, and should continue to menace France?"

"The duke is in love like a madman or, rather, like an idiot," replied Richelieu, with intense bitterness. "Like the Paladins of old, he has only undertaken this war to obtain a glance from his mistress's eyes. If he knows that the war will cost the lady of his love her honor and perhaps her liberty, I promise you that he will look twice before he gives his answer."

"But," said the lady, with a perseverance which roved that she was determined to understand all that as included in the mission she was about to undertake, but still, if he *should* persist?"

"If he persists?" said the cardinal; "but it is not robable."

"It is possible," rejoined the lady.

"If he persists——" His eminence paused, and then ontinued: "If he persists—well, I must put my hope one of those events which change the fortunes of tates."

"If your eminence would cite to me some of those istorical events," said her ladyship, "I might possibly articipate in your confidence concerning the future."

"Well, look, for example," said Richelieu; "when, or a cause very similar to that which now actuates the uke, his Majesty Henry IV., of glorious memory, went 1610 to invade at the same time both Flanders and taly, in order that he might assail Austria on both des, did not an event occur which saved Austria? Is ot the king of France entitled to the same good fortune the emperor?"

"Your eminence alludes to the assassin's knife in the ue de la Feronniere?"

"Exactly so," said the cardinal.

"Is your eminence not afraid that the fate of Ravaillac ould deter those who might be for an instant tempted imitate his example?"

"In all times and all countries, especially in those ountries which are divided in religious faith, there are ways religious fanatics who would be well contented be looked upon as martyrs. And here, at this very oment. it occurs to me that the Puritans are furious gainst the Duke of Buckingham and that their preachers eak of him as the Antichrist."

"Well?" inquired her ladyship.

"Well," continued the cardinal, in a careless tone it would be only necessary, for instance, to find some ung, beautiful and clever woman who wanted to take

revenge upon the duke. Such a woman may be found. The duke has been a favored lover, and, if he has sown much affection by his promises of deathless constancy, he has also sown much hatred by his eternal infidelities."

"Unquestionably," remarked her ladyship, coldly, "such a woman may be found."

"Well, such a woman would, by putting the knife of Clement or of Ravaillac into the hands of an assassin, save France."

"Yes, but she would be an accomplice in assassination."

"Have the accomplices of Ravaillac or of Jacques Clement ever been discovered?"

"No, for they stood, perhaps, too high in the world for any one to dare to seek them where they really were. It is not for everybody, my lord, that a Palace of Justice would be burnt down."

"What, do you not believe, then, that the burning of the palace was an accident?" asked Richelieu, in the very tone with which he would have asked the most unimportant question.

"I, my lord," replied her ladyship, "I have no belief about it. I cite a fact, nothing more. Only, I would say, that if I were called Mademoiselle de Montpensier or the Queen Marie de Medicis, I should take fewer precautions than I do as simple Lady de Winter."

"That is strictly logical," said Richelieu; "what is it, then, you require?"

"I require an order ratifying beforehand whatever I may think it necessary to do for the prosperity of France."

"But we must first find the woman I alluded to who craves revenge upon the duke."

"She is found," said the lady.

"Then we must find the wretched fanatic who will serve as the instrument of God's judgment."

"He shall be found!"

"Well," said the cardinal, "it will then be time enough to solicit the order that you have just asked for."

"Your eminence is right," resumed her ladyship, "and

was to blame for seeing in the mission with which you onor me anything beyond what it in truth embraces— hat is, to announce to his grace, in your eminence's name, hat you are aware of the different disguises under which e contrived to approach the queen at the entertainment iven by the constable's lady; that you have proofs of he interview which the queen granted at the Louvre to certain Italian astrologer, who was no other than the)uke of Buckingham; that you have given directions for witty little romance to be written concerning the adenture at Amiens, with a plan of the garden in which was enacted and portraits of the actors who took part n it; that Montague is in the Bastile and that the orture will make him tell all that he remembers and ven much that he does not remember; and finally, hat you possess a certain letter from Madame de Chereuse, which was found in his grace's quarters and which trangely compromises not only the lady that wrote it, ut also her in whose name it was written. But if e persists, in spite of these representations, as this is ne limit of my commission, it will only remain for me o pray to God to perform a miracle for the salvation of rance. This is my precise charge, is it not, my lord, nd I have nothing further to perform?"

"Exactly so," said Richelieu, coldly.

"And now," continued her ladyship, without appearng to observe the altered manner of the cardinal toward er; "since I have received your eminence's instruc ons with regard to your enemies, will your lordship ermit me to say a few words concerning my own?"

"You have enemies, then?" said Richelieu.

"Yes, my lord, enemies against whom you are bound o support me, since I made them in serving your emience."

"And who are they?" demanded the cardinal.

"There is, first, a little busybody of the name of onancieux."

"She is in prison at Nantes."

"That is to say, she *was* there," replied the lady;

" but the queen has managed to extract an order from the king, by the assistance of which she has been removed to a convent."

" To a convent ? " said the cardinal.

" Yes ; a convent."

" And *what* convent ? "

" I do not know ; the secret has been well kept."

" I will find out, though ! "

" And your eminence will surely let me know in what convent this woman is ? "

" I have no objection," replied the cardinal.

" Very well. Now I have another enemy, whom I fear far more than this little Madame Bonancieux."

" Who is that ? "

" Her lover."

" What is his name ? "

" Oh, your eminence knows him well ! " exclaimed the lady, carried away by her anger ; " it is the evil genius of both of us ; it is he who, in an encounter with your eminence's guards, decided the victory in favour of the king's musketeers ; it is he who gave three sword wounds to De Wardes, your eminence's emissary, and who rendered the promising affair of the diamond stud abortive ; and lastly, it is he who, knowing that it was I who had deprived him of Madame Bonancieux, has sworn my death."

" Ah, ah ! " said the cardinal, " I know who you mean."

" Yes, I mean that wretch, D'Artagnan."

" He is a bold fellow," said the cardinal.

" And it is exactly because he is a bold fellow that he is the more to be feared."

" We ought first," said the cardinal, " to have some proof of his connection with the duke."

" A proof ! " exclaimed the lady, " I will have a dozen."

" Well, then, let me have that proof and it is the simplest thing in the world—I will clap him in the Bastile."

"Very well, my lord; and afterwards?"

"When a man is in the Bastile there is no *afterwards*," said the cardinal, in a hollow voice. "Ah, egad!" continued he, "if it was as easy for me to get rid of my enemy as it is to rid you of yours, and if it was against such people as these that you craved impunity——"

"My lord," said the lady, "boon for boon, life for life, man for man; give me the one and I will give you the other."

"I do not understand what you mean," replied the cardinal, "nor do I wish to do so; but I shall be glad to oblige you, and I see no objection to giving you the order you demand as to such an insignificant creature as this; and the more willingly, as you tell me that this little D'Artagnan is a libertine, a duelist, and a traitor."

"A wretch, my lord! a wretch!"

"Then give me a pen, ink and paper," said the cardinal.

"Here they are, my lord."

"Very well."

There was a moment's silence, which proved that the cardinal was occupied in thinking of the words in which the order should be written, or perhaps, in writing it. Athos, who had not lost one syllable of the conversation, took a hand of each of his companions and led them for safety to the other end of the room.

"Well," said Porthos, "what do you want and why do you not let us hear the end of the conversation?"

"Hush!" said Athos in a whisper; "we have heard all that it was necessary for us to hear; besides, I do not hinder you from listening to the rest, but I must go."

"You must go," said Porthos; "but if the cardinal should ask for you, what are we to say?"

"You will not wait for him to ask. You will tell him beforehand that I am gone forward to clear the way, since, from certain words of our landlord's, I have been led to suppose that the road is not quite safe. I will drop a word or two to the cardinal's equerry. The rest concerns myself; do not be uneasy about it."

"Be prudent, Athos," said Aramis.

"Make yourself easy," replied Athos; "you know that I am cool enough."

Porthos and Aramis returned again to their places near the funnel. As for Athos, he went out without any disguise, took his horse, which was fastened with those of his two friends to the shutter, convinced the equerry in four words of the necessity of an advance guard for their safe conduct home, looked with unusual care to the priming of his pistols, put his sword between his teeth and set off as a forlorn hope on the road that led toward the camp.

CHAPTER XLV.

A CONJUGAL SCENE.

As Athos had foreseen, it was not long before the cardinal came down. He opened the door of the room in which he had left the three musketeers and found Porthos and Aramis engaged in a most earnest game of dice. With a rapid glance he examined every corner of the room and saw that one of the guards was missing.

"What has become of M. Athos?" he asked.

"My lord," replied Porthos, "he is gone forward on the lookout, as some remarks of our landlord's led him to suspect that the road was not safe."

"And what have you been doing, M. Porthos?"

"I have won five pistoles from Aramis."

"And can you now return with me?"

"We are at your eminence's command."

"To horse, then, gentlemen, for it is getting late."

The equerry was at the door, holding the cardinal's horse. At a little distance two men and three horses were visible in the night; these were the individuals who were to conduct Milady to the Fort de la Pointe and to superintend her embarkation.

The equerry confirmed what the two musketeers had

lready told the cardinal concerning Athos. Richelieu ave a sign of approbation and resumed his journey, aking the same precautions in returning as he had done n advance.

Let us leave him on his way to the camp, protected y the equerry and the two musketeers, and return to thos.

For a hundred yards he preserved the same pace. ut once out of sight he pushed his horse to the right, ade a small circuit and returned to within twenty aces, where, concealed in a coppice, he awaited the assage of the little troop. Having recognized the laced ats of his companions and the gold fringe of the cardinal's cloak, he tarried till the party had turned the rner of the road, and having lost sight of them, he alloped up to the tavern and was admitted without any ifficulty.

The landlord knew him again.

" My commanding officer," said Athos, " has forgotten communication of importance he should have made to he lady on the first floor and has sent me to repair his rgetfulness."

" Go up," said the landlord. " The lady is still in her amber."

Athos availed himself of this permission and ascended he stairs with his lightest step; and when he had ached the landing-place he perceived, through the half-pen door, the lady, who was tying on her hat.

He entered the room and closed the door behind him.

Enveloped in his cloak and with his hat drawn down pon his eyes, Athos stood upright before the door.

On seeing this mysterious figure, mute and motionless s a statue, the lady was greatly alarmed.

" Who are you and what do you want ? " exclaimed

" Yes ! it is indeed she," muttered Athos.

Letting his cloak fall and lifting up his hat, he advanced toward her ladyship.

" Do you recognize me, madame ? " said he.

The lady took one step forward and then recoiled as though Athos had been an adder.

"Come," said Athos, "I can see that you recognize me."

"The Count de la Fère!" muttered her ladyship growing deadly pale and drawing back till the wall impeded her retreat.

"Yes, milady," replied Athos, "the Count de la Fère in person, who returns expressly from the other world to have the pleasure of seeing you. Let us sit down then, and converse, as the cardinal said."

Impelled by unutterable terror, her ladyship sat down without uttering a word.

"You are a demon let loose upon the earth," said Athos. "Your power is great, I know; but you know also, that with God's assistance men have often overcome most terrible fiends. You have once before crossed my path. I thought I had crushed you, madame, but either I deceived myself or hell has given you new life."

At these words, which recalled fearful memories, the lady held down her head and groaned.

"Yes, hell has given you new life," resumed Athos, "has made you rich, has given you another name, has almost endowed you with another face; but it has not expunged either the brand upon your body or the stain upon your soul."

The lady arose as if operated by a spring and her eyes darted lightning. Athos remained seated.

"You thought me dead, did you?" he continued, "as I thought you dead; and the name of Athos has concealed the Count de la Fère, even as the name of Lady de Winter has concealed Anne de Breuil. Was it not thus we were called when your honored brother married us? Our position is truly strange," continued Athos, laughing; "we have both of us only lived, as now, because each thought the other dead; and the remembrance is less burdensome than a reality, although a remembrance, even, is sometimes a voracious thing."

"But, after all," said the lady, in a hollow voice

what brings you here to me and what do you want ith me ? "

" I want to tell you that although I have been in- isible to you, I have not lost sight of you."

" You know what I have done ? "

" I can recite your actions day by day, from your en- rance into the cardinal's service until this present night."

A smile of incredulity passed across the ashy lips of ilady.

" Listen. It is you who cut the two diamond studs om Buckingham's shoulder ; it is you who abducted adame Bonancieux ; it is you who, enamored of De ardes and thinking to receive him, opened your door M. d'Artagnan ; it is you who, believing that De ardes deceived you, wished to have him slain by his val ; it is you who, when this rival had discovered our disgraceful secret, sought to have him assassinated his turn by two murderers whom you sent to dog m ; it is you who, when you found bullets fail, sent isoned wine, with a forged letter, to make your victim ncy that it was the present of his friends ; and lastly is you who, here in this very room, seated on the ry chair where I now sit, have this moment made an gagement with Cardinal Richelieu to get the Duke Buckingham assassinated, in exchange for his under- king to allow you to assassinate M. d'Artagnan."

Her ladyship was livid.

" You must indeed be Satan ! " said she.

" Perhaps so," replied Athos ; " but at all events ark this well : assassinate the Duke of Buckingham, cause him to be assassinated—it is of no consequence me, I know him not ; and he is, besides, the enemy France. But touch not one single hair of the head D'Artagnan, who is my faithful friend, whom I love d will protect, or I swear to you, by my father's head, at the crime which you have then committed or tempted to commit shall be indeed your last."

" M. d'Artagnan has cruelly insulted me," said she, nd he must die."

"Indeed! And is it possible that *you* can be insulted madame?" said Athos, with an inexpressibly scornful laugh. "He has insulted *you* and he must die!"

"He shall die!" repeated her ladyship; "she first and he afterward."

Athos felt his brain begin to reel. The sight of this creature, who had nothing of the woman in her nature recalled most fearful recollections. He thought that one day, in a situation less perilous than that in which he now stood, he had already sought to sacrifice her to his honor. His murderous desire came burning back upon him like an invading fever. He arose in his turn and put his hand to his belt, from which he drew a pistol which he cocked.

The lady, pale as a corpse, endeavored to cry out. Her frozen tongue could only utter a hoarse sound which had no resemblance to the human voice, but seemed rather the growl of some savage beast. Glued as she were against the gloomy tapestry, with her dishevelled hair she looked like the appalling image of Terror.

Athos slowly raised the pistol, stretched forth his arm until the weapon almost touched the lady's forehead and then, in a voice the more terrible as it had all the intense calmness of an inflexible resolution:

"Madame," said he, "you must immediately give me the paper which the cardinal wrote just now, or, on my soul, I will blow out your brains!"

With any other man the lady might have had some doubt; but she *knew* Athos. Nevertheless, she remained motionless.

"You have one second to decide in," continued he.

The lady saw from the contraction of his brow that the shot was coming; she hastily put her hands to her bosom and drew forth a paper, which she handed to Athos.

"Take it," said she, "and may you be forevermore accursed."

Athos took the paper, replaced the pistol in his belt, went to the lamp to assure himself that he had the right one, unfolded it and read:

"It is by my order and for the good of the state that the bearer of this did that which he has now done.

"RICHELIEU."

"And now," said Athos, resuming his cloak and replacing his hat upon his head, "and now that I have drawn your teeth, bite if you can!"

He left the lady without even once looking behind him.

At the door he found the two men with the horse which they were leading.

"Gentlemen," said he, "his lordship's orders are, as you know, to conduct this lady without loss of time to the Fort de la Pointe and not to leave her until she is on board."

As these words exactly accorded with the order which they had received, they bowed their heads in token of assent.

As for Athos, he sprang lightly into his saddle and went off at a gallop. Only instead of keeping to the road he went across the country, pushing his horse on very fast and halting from time to time to listen.

In one of these halts he heard the sound of several horses on the road. He did not doubt that it was the cardinal and his escort. Taking immediately another direction forward and then rubbing his horse down with some broom and dry leaves, he placed himself in the middle of the road at no more than two hundred paces from the camp.

"Who goes there?" cried he, when he heard the horsemen.

"It is our brave musketeer, I believe," said the cardinal.

"Yes, my lord," replied Athos, "it is himself."

"M. Athos," said Richelieu, "accept my best thanks for the care you have taken. Gentlemen, we have reached our destination. Take the gate to the left hand; the word for the night is, '*Roi et Ré.*'"

As he said this the cardinal bowed to the three friends and turned to the right, followed by his equerry; for that night he slept in the camp.

"Well," said Porthos and Aramis, as soon as the cardinal was out of hearing, "well, he signed the paper that she asked for."

"I know it," said Athos quietly, "for here it is."

The three friends did not exchange another word before they reached their quarters, excepting to give the word to the sentinels on guard.

But they sent Musqueton to tell Planchet that his master was requested, on leaving the trenches, to come immediately to the musketeers' quarters.

On the other hand, as Athos had foreseen, Milady, on finding the two men at the door, followed them without hesitation. She had for an instant an idea of seeking another interview with the cardinal and relating to him what had passed; but a revelation on her part would produce one from Athos. She might say, indeed, that Athos had hanged her, but he would state that she was branded. So she thought it better to be silent, to depart discreetly, to accomplish with her accustomed ability the difficult commission which had been intrusted to her, and then, when these things were ended to the cardinal's satisfaction, to return and claim her revenge.

Consequently, having traveled all night, she was at Fort la Pointe by seven in the morning; at eight she was aboard and at nine the vessel weighed anchor and made sail for England.

CHAPTER XLVI.

THE BASTION OF ST. GERVAIS.

On arriving at his friends' quarters D'Artagnan found them assembled in the same room. Athos was thinking, Porthos was twisting his mustache, and Aramis was reading his prayers in a charming little book, bound in blue velvet.

"By my soul, gentlemen," said he, "I hope that what

you have to tell me is worth the trouble, otherwise I should not forgive your depriving me of rest after a night passed in dismantling a bastion entirely by myself. Ah, why were you not there, gentlemen? It was not work?"

"We were in another place, where it was by no means cold, either," said Porthos, giving his mustache a turn peculiar to himself.

"Hush!" said Athos.

"Oh, oh!" said D'Artagnan, understanding the slight frown of the musketeer, "it seems that there is something new stirring."

"Aramis," said Athos, "you breakfasted at the Parpaillot tavern the day before yesterday, I believe."

"Yes."

"How are things there?"

"Why, I fared but poorly myself; it was a fast day, and they had only eggs."

"What," said Athos, "in a seaport, and no fish?"

"They say that the dyke which the cardinal is digging drives the fish out into the open sea," said Aramis, resuming his pious reading.

"But that is not what I wanted to know, Aramis," continued Athos. "Were you free, and did no one disturb you?"

"Why, I think that there were not many idlers," replied Aramis. "Yes, in fact, for what you want, Athos, I think we shall do well enough at the Parpaillot."

"Come, then, let us to the Parpaillot," said Athos, "for here the walls are like sheets of paper."

D'Artagnan, who was accustomed to his friend's manner and understood by a word, a gesture, or a look from him, that circumstances called for seriousness, took his arm and went out with him without uttering a word. Porthos followed them, in conversation with Aramis.

On their way they met Grimaud, and Athos beckoned him to attend them. Grimaud, according to custom, obeyed in silence. The poor fellow had finished by almost forgetting how to speak.

When they arrived at the Parpaillot it was seven i the morning and the day was just beginning to dawn The three friends ordered a good breakfast and entere a room where the landlord assured them that they woul not be disturbed.

The hour was, unfortunately, ill-chosen for a con sultation. The morning drum had just been beaten every one was busy shaking off the sleepiness of nigh and to drive away the dampness of the morning ai came to take a little dram at the tavern. Dragoons Swiss guards, musketeers and light cavalry succeede one another with a rapidity very beneficial to th business of mine host, but very unfavorable to th designs of our four friends, who replied but sullenly t the salutations, toasts and jests of their companions.

"Come," said Athos, "we shall invite some rousin quarrel on our hands presently, and we do not wan that just now. D'Artagnan, tell us about your night work; we will tell you ours afterward."

"In fact," said one of the light cavalry, who, whils rocking himself, held in his hand a glass of brand which he slowly sipped, "in fact, you were in the trenche you gentlemen of the guards, and it seems to me that yo had a squabble with the Rochellais."

D'Artagnan looked at Athos to see whether he ough to answer this intruder who thrust himself into th conversation.

"Well," said Athos, "did you hear M. de Busigny who did you the honor to address you? Tell us wha took place in the night, since these gentlemen desire it.

"Did you not take a bastion?" asked a Swiss, wh was drinking rum and beer mixed.

"Yes, sir," replied D'Artagnan, bowing, "we had tha honor. And also, as you have heard, we introduced barrel of powder under one of the angles, which, on ex ploding, made a very pretty breach, without reckonin that, as the bastion is very old, all the rest of the build ing is much shaken."

"And what bastion is it?" asked a dragoon wh

held, spitted on his sabre, a goose which he had brought to be cooked.

"The bastion St. Gervais," replied D'Artagnan, "from behind which the Rochellais annoyed our workmen."

"And was it warm work?"

"Yes. We lost five men and the Rochellais some eight or ten."

"*Balzampleu!*" said the Swiss, who, in spite of the admirable collection of oaths which the German language possesses, had got a habit of swearing in French.

"But it is probable," said the light horseman, "that they will send pioneers to repair the bastion this morning."

"Yes, it is probable," said D'Artagnan.

"Gentlemen," said Athos, "a wager!"

"Ah, a wager!" said the Swiss.

"What is it?" asked the light horseman.

"Stop," said the dragoon, laying his sabre like a spit on the two great iron dogs which kept up the fire in the chimney, "I am busy. A dripping-pan here, you noodle of a landlord, that I may not lose one drop of the fat of this celestial bird."

"He is right," said the Swiss; "the juice of a goose is very good with puddings."

"There!" said the dragoon; "and now for the wager. We are listening, M. Athos."

"Well, M. de Busigny," said Athos, "I bet you that my three comrades, Messieurs Porthos, Aramis, and D'Artagnan, and myself, will go and breakfast in the bastion of St. Gervais, and that we will stay there for one hour by the clock, whatever the enemy may do to dislodge us."

Porthos and Aramis looked at each other, for they began to understand.

"Why," said D'Artagnan, stooping to Athos's ear, "you are going to get us all killed without mercy."

"We shall be more certainly killed if we do not go," replied Athos.

"Ah, faith, gentlemen," said Porthos, throwing him-

self back in his chair and twisting his mustache, "that is a fine wager, I hope."

"And I accept it," said M. de Busigny. "Now we must fix the stakes."

"You are four, gentlemen," said Athos, "and we are four; a dinner for eight—will that suit you?"

"Just the thing!" replied M. de Busigny.

"The very thing!" added the dragoon.

"That will do!" exclaimed the Swiss. The fourth auditor, who had remained silent throughout the conversation, bowed his head as a sign that he acquiesced in the proposition.

"The *déjeuner* of these gentlemen is ready," said the landlord.

"Well, then, bring it here," said Athos.

The landlord obeyed. Athos called Grimaud, showed him a large basket which was lying in a corner, and made a sign to him to wrap up in the napkins all the eatables that had been brought.

Grimaud, comprehending at once that they were going to breakfast on the grass, took the basket, packed up the eatables, put in the bottles and took the basket up in his arms.

"But where are you going to eat this breakfast?" said the landlord.

"What does it signify to you," replied Athos, "provided you are paid for it?" and he threw two pistoles majestically on the table.

"Shall I get you change, sir?" said mine host.

"No; but add a couple of bottles of champagne and the difference will pay for the napkins."

The landlord had not made quite such a good thing of it as he at first expected; but he recompensed himself for it by palming off on his four guests two bottles of Anjou wine instead of the two bottles of champagne.

"M. de Busigny, will you regulate your watch by mine, or permit me to regulate mine by yours?" inquired Athos.

"Whichever you please," said the light dragoon

drawing from his fob a very beautiful watch encircled with diamonds. "Half-past seven," added he.

"Five-and-thirty minutes after seven," said Athos; "we shall remember that I am five minutes in advance, sir."

Then bowing to the astonished waiters, the four young men took the road toward the bastion of St. Gervais, followed by Grimaud, who carried the basket, not knowing where he was going, and, from the passive obedience that was habitual to him, not thinking even of inquiring.

Whilst they were within the precincts of the camp the four friends did not exchange a word; they were, besides, followed by the curious, who, having heard of the wager, wished to know how they would extricate themselves from the affair. But when once they had got beyond the lines of fortification and found themselves in the open country, D'Artagnan, who was entirely ignorant of what they were about, thought it high time to demand some explanation.

"And now, my dear Athos," said he, "have the kindness to tell me where you are going."

"You can see well enough," replied Athos, "we are going to the bastion."

"But what are we going to do there?"

"You know very well; we are going to breakfast there."

"But why do we not breakfast at the Parpaillot?"

"Because we have most important things to tell you and it was impossible to converse for five minutes in that tavern with all those troublesome fellows who come and go and continually address us. Here, at least," continued Athos, pointing to the bastion, "no one will come to interrupt us."

"It appears to me," said D'Artagnan, with that prudence which was so intimately and so naturally connected with his superb courage, "it appears to me that we could have found some retired spot somewhere in the sand hills on the sea shore."

"Where we should have been seen all four in council

together, so that in a quarter of an hour the cardinal would have been informed by his spies that we were holding a consultation."

"Yes," said Aramis, "Athos is right; *animadvertuntur in desertis.*"

"A desert would not have been a bad place," remarked Porthos, "but the difficulty is to find it."

"There is no desert where a bird could not pass over one's head or a fish jump from the water or a rabbit run from her seat; and I believe that bird, fish and rabbit, one and all, have become the cardinal's spies. It is much better, therefore, to pursue our enterprise. Besides, we cannot now recede without disgrace. We have made a bet, a bet which could not have been foreseen and of which I defy any one to guess the true cause. To win it we must remain an hour in the bastion. Either we shall or shall not be attacked. If we are not, we shall have time to talk and no one will hear us, for I will answer for it that the walls of that bastion have no ears. If we are attacked we will talk just the same, and shall, moreover, by defending ourselves, be covered with glory. So you see that everything is favorable to us."

"Yes," said D'Artagnan, "but we shall inevitably be shot."

"Yes," rejoined Athos, "but you know very well that the bullets most to be feared are not those of the enemy."

"Yet it seems to me," said Porthos, "that for such an expedition we should at least have brought our muskets."

"You are a simpleton, friend Porthos; why should we encumber ourselves with a useless burden?"

"I do not find a good regulation musket, with a dozen cartridges and a powder-flask, useless in front of an enemy."

"Well," rejoined Athos, "did you not hear what D'Artagnan said?"

"And what did D'Artagnan say?" asked Porthos.

"D'Artagnan says that in last night's attack as many

as eight or ten French were killed and as many of the enemy."

"Well?"

"There has not been time to strip them, has there, seeing there was something more urgent to attend to?"

"Well?"

"Well, we shall find their muskets, powder-flasks and cartridges, and instead of four muskets and a dozen balls we shall have about fifteen muskets and a hundred rounds of ammunition to fire."

"Oh, Athos!" said Aramis, "you are indeed a great man!"

Porthos bowed his head in token of acquiescence.

D'Artagnan alone did not appear quite convinced.

Grimaud unquestionably partook of the young man's incredulity, for, seeing that they continued to march toward the bastion, of which he had before had some suspicion, he plucked his master by the skirt of his coat.

"Where are you going?" he inquired by a sign.

Athos pointed to the bastion.

"But," said the silent Grimaud, still in the same dialect, "we shall leave our skins there."

Athos raised his eyes and his hands to heaven.

Grimaud set down his basket on the ground and seated himself upon it, shaking his head.

Athos took a pistol from his belt, looked at the priming, cocked it, and leveled it at Grimaud's ear.

Grimaud found himself lifted up and on his legs, as if by magic.

Athos then beckoned to him to take up the basket and to march in front.

Grimaud obeyed; so that all the poor fellow had gained by this momentary pantomime was that he had been transformed from the rear guard to the van.

Having reached the bastion, the four friends looked behind them. More than three hundred soldiers of every kind had assembled at the entrance of the camp, and in a separate group they saw M. de Busigny, the dragon, the Swiss and the fourth wagerer.

Athos took off his hat, raised it on the end of his sword and waved it in the air.

All the spectators returned his salutation, accompanying this act of politeness with a loud hurrah, which reached their ears.

After this occurrence they all four disappeared in the bastion, where Grimaud had already preceded them.

CHAPTER XLVII.

THE COUNCIL OF THE MUSKETEERS.

As Athos had foreseen, the bastion was tenanted alone by about a dozen dead—French and Rochellais.

"Gentlemen," said Athos, who had taken command of the expedition, "whilst Grimaud sets the table let us begin by collecting muskets and ammunition. We can, moreover, converse whilst we are doing it. These gentlemen," added he, pointing to the dead bodies, "do not hear us."

"But we may, nevertheless, throw them into the ditches," said Porthos, "having first satisfied ourselves that they have nothing in their pockets."

"Yes," replied Athos, "but that is Grimaud's business."

"Well, then," said D'Artagnan, "let Grimaud search them and throw them over the walls."

"Not upon any account," said Athos. "They may be of the utmost use to us."

"These dead of use to us!" exclaimed Porthos. "Ah, nonsense! you are surely going crazy, my dear friend."

"'Do not judge rashly,' advise both gospel and cardinal," replied Athos. "How many muskets are there, gentlemen?"

"Twelve."

"How much ammunition?"

" A hundred rounds."

" It is quite as many as we shall need ; let us load our muskets."

The four companions set themselves to work, and just as they had loaded the last gun Grimaud made a sign to them that breakfast was ready.

Athos indicated by a gesture that he was contented with what was done and then pointed out to Grimaud a sort of sheltered box where he was to place himself as sentinel. But to mitigate the annoyance of his guard, Athos allowed him to take with him a loaf, a couple of cutlets and a bottle of wine.

" And now, to breakfast ! " said Athos.

The four friends seated themselves on the ground with their legs crossed, like Turks or tailors.

" And now," said D'Artagnan, " as you are no longer afraid of being heard, I hope you are going to let us have the secret."

" I hope I am providing you at the same time with both amusement and glory, gentlemen ! " said Athos. " I have induced you to take a charming little excursion ; here is an admirable breakfast, and away over yonder are five hundred persons, as you may perceive through the embrasures, who take us for madmen or heroes—two classes of fools that very much resemble each other."

" But this secret ? "

" I saw Milady last night," said Athos.

D'Artagnan was carrying his glass to his lips, but at the sound of Her Ladyship's name his hand trembled so that he placed his glass on the ground, in order that he might not spill its contents.

" You have seen your wi——"

" Hush, then ! " interrupted Athos ; " you forget, my dear fellow, that these gentlemen are not, like you, initiated in my family affairs. I have seen Her Ladyship."

" And where happened that ? " demanded D'Artagnan.

"About two leagues from hence, at the Red Dovecote."

"In that case I am a lost man," said D'Artagnan.

"Not just yet," replied Athos; "for by this time she must have quitted the shores of France."

D'Artagnan breathed again.

"But, after all," inquired Porthos, "who is this lady?"

"A charming woman!" said Athos, tasting a glass of sparkling wine. "Scamp of a landlord!" exclaimed he, "who gives us Anjou for champagne and who thinks we shall be deceived by the substitution! Yes!" continued he, "a charming woman, to whom our friend D'Artagnan has done something unpardonable, for which she is seeking every human means to avenge herself—a month ago by trying to get him shot; a week ago by sending him poison, and yesterday by demanding his head of the cardinal."

"What! demanding my head of the cardinal?" cried D'Artagnan, pale with terror.

"Yes," said Porthos, "it is as true as gospel, for I heard her with my own ears."

"And I also," said Aramis.

"Then," said D'Artagnan, letting his arm fall in a desponding manner, "it is useless to struggle longer; I may as well blow out my brains at once and have done with it."

"That is the *last* folly a man should perpetrate," said Athos, "seeing it is the only one which will admit of no remedy."

"But with such enemies I shall never escape," said D'Artagnan. "First, my unknown antagonist of Meung; then, De Wardes, on whom I inflicted four wounds; next, this lady, whose secret I found out; and lastly, the cardinal, whose vengeance I intercepted."

"Well!" said Athos, "and all this makes only four, and we are four—one against one. Egad! if we may trust to Grimaud's signs, we are now about to engage with a far greater number of foes. What's the matter, Grimaud? Considering the seriousness of the cir-

cumstance, I permit you to speak, my friend; but be laconic, I beseech you. What do you see?"

"A troop."

"How many persons?"

"Twenty men."

"What sort of men?"

"Sixteen sappers and four dragoons,"

"How far are they off?"

"Five hundred paces."

"Good! We have still time to finish our fowl and to drink a glass of wine. To your health, D'Artagnan!"

"Your health!" repeated Aramis and Porthos.

"Well, then, to my health, although I do not imagine that your good wishes will be of much benefit to me."

"Bah!" said Athos. "God is great, as the Mohammedans say, and the future is in His hands."

Then having swallowed his wine and put the glass down, Athos carelessly arose, took the first musket that came to hand and stole toward an embrasure.

The three others did the same. As for Grimaud, he had orders to place himself behind them and to reload their muskets.

An instant afterward they saw the troop appearing. It came along a kind of branch trench, which formed a communication between the bastion and the town.

"Zounds!" said Athos, "it is scarcely worth while to disturb ourselves for a score of fellows armed with pickaxes, mattocks and spades! Grimaud ought to have quietly beckoned to them to go about their business and I am quite convinced that they would have left us to ourselves."

"I must doubt it," said D'Artagnan, "for they come forward with great resolution. Besides, in addition to the workmen there are four soldiers and a brigadier, armed with muskets."

"That is because they have not seen us," replied Athos.

"Faith," said Aramis, "I confess that I am reluctant to fire upon these poor devils of citizens."

"He is a bad priest," said Porthos, "who pities heretics."

"Upon my word," said Athos, "Aramis is right. I will give them a preliminary talking to."

"What the plague are you doing?" cried D'Artagnan; "you will get yourself shot, my dear fellow."

But Athos paid no attention to this warning, and mounting on the breach, his fusee in one hand and his hat in the other:

"Gentlemen," said he, bowing courteously and addressing himself to the soldiers and pioneers, who, astonished by this apparition, halted at about fifty paces from the bastion, "gentlemen, we are, some of my friends and myself, engaged at breakfast in the bastion. Now you know that nothing is more disagreeable than to be disturbed at breakfast; so we entreat you, if you really have business here, to wait till we have finished our repast or to come back in a little while; unless, indeed, you experience the salutary desire of forsaking the ranks of rebellion and coming to drink with us to the health of the king of France."

"Take care, Athos," said D'Artagnan; "don't you see that they are taking aim at you?"

"Yes, yes," said Athos; "but these are citizens, who are shocking bad marksmen and will take particular care to shoot wide of the mark."

In fact, at that moment four shots were fired and the bullets whistled around Athos, but without one touching him.

Four shots were instantaneously returned, but with a far better aim than that of the aggressors; three soldiers fell dead and one of the pioneers was wounded.

"Grimaud," said Athos, from the breach, "another musket."

Grimaud obeyed instantly.

The three friends had also reloaded their arms. A second discharge soon followed the first and the brigadier and two pioneers fell dead. The rest of the troop took to flight.

"Come, gentlemen, a sortie!" said Athos.

The four friends rushed out of the fort, reached the field of battle, picked up the muskets of the soldiers and the half-pike of the brigadier, and, satisfied that the fugitives would never stop till they reached the town, they returned to the bastion, bearing with them the trophies of their victory.

"Reload, Grimaud," said Athos, "and let us, gentlemen, continue our breakfast and conversation. Where were we?"

"I recollect," said D'Artagnan; "you were saying that, after having demanded my head of the cardinal, Her Ladyship had left the shores of France. And where is she going?" added D'Artagnan, who was painfully anxious about the lady's itinerary.

"She is going to England," replied Athos.

"And with what object?"

"To assassinate the Duke of Buckingham or to get him assassinated."

D'Artagnan uttered an exclamation of surprise and indignation.

"It is infamous!" exclaimed he.

"Oh, as to that," said Athos, "I beg you to believe that I concern myself very little about it. Now that you have finished, Grimaud," continued he, "take the half-pike of our brigadier, fasten a napkin to it and fix it on the end of our bastion, that those rebellious Rochellais may see that they are opposed to brave and loyal subjects of the king."

Grimaud obeyed without reply and an instant afterward the white flag floated over the heads of the four friends. A cry of joy, a thunder of applause saluted its appearance. Half the camp was at the barriers.

"What!" said D'Artagnan, "you concern yourself but little about her killing Buckingham or causing him to be killed? The duke is our friend."

"The duke is an Englishman; the duke fights against us: let her do, therefore, as she likes with the duke. I care as little about him as an empty bottle."

As Athos said this he threw some fifteen yards before him a bottle which he held in his hand and from which he had just emptied the last drop into his own glass.

"Wait an instant," said D'Artagnan, "I will not abandon Buckingham in that manner; he gave us some very beautiful horses."

"And especially some very beautiful saddles," added Porthos, who was then wearing the gold lace of one of them upon his cloak.

"Besides," said Aramis, "God seeks for the conversion, not the death of a sinner."

"Amen!" said Athos, "and we will return to that by and by, if such is your pleasure; but that which most engaged my attention at the time, and I am sure you will understand why, D'Artagnan, was how to get from this woman a *carte-blanche* which she had extorted from the cardinal and by means of which she might get rid of you, and perhaps the whole of us, with impunity."

"This creature is a very demon," said Porthos, holding his plate to Aramis, who was cutting up a fowl.

"And this document," said D'Artagnan; "did it remain in her hands?"

"No, it passed into mine. I cannot say without some trouble, for if I did I should tell a lie."

"My dear Athos," said D'Artagnan, "I can no longer count the times I owe my life to you."

"Then it was to visit her that you quitted us?" said Aramis.

"Exactly so."

"And you have got the cardinal's letter?" inquired D'Artagnan.

"Here it is," replied Athos.

He took the precious paper from the pocket of his coat. D'Artagnan unfolded it with a hand of which he did not attempt to hide the trembling and read:

"It is by my order and for the good of the state that the bearer of this did that which he has now done.

"RICHELIEU."

"It is, in fact, a regular absolution," said Aramis.

"We must destroy this paper," said D'Artagnan, who seemed to read in it his own sentence of death.

"On the contrary," said Athos, "it must be most scrupulously preserved; and I would not give it up for the golden louis that would cover it."

"And what will she do now?" inquired D'Artagnan.

"Why," said Athos, carelessly, "she will write to the cardinal that a cursed musketeer named Athos took her safeguard from her by force, and she will at the same time advise his eminence to get rid of him and also of his two friends, Porthos and Aramis. The cardinal will recollect that these are the very men that are always in his way. Then some fine morning he will have D'Artagnan arrested and, that he may not be bored to death by solitude, will send us to keep him company in the Bastile."

"Ah!" said Porthos, "I think that you are making some rather dismal jokes."

"I am not joking," replied Athos.

"Do you know," said Porthos, "that I fancy it would be a more venial crime to twist this cursed lady's neck than those of these poor devils of Huguenots, who have never committed any greater crime than singing in French the very same psalms we sing in Latin."

"What does the abbé say to that?" quietly asked Athos.

"In that I am quite of Porthos's opinion."

"And I also," said D'Artagnan.

"Happily she is far away," added Porthos; "for I confess she would much annoy me here."

"She annoys me in England as well as in France," said Athos.

"She annoys me everywhere," said D'Artagnan.

"But when you had her in your power," said Porthos, "why did you not drown, strangle, or hang her? It is only the dead who never return."

"Do you think so, Porthos?" said Athos, with a dark smile which D'Artagnan alone could understand.

"I have an idea," said D'Artagnan.

"Let us hear it!" cried the musketeers.

"*To arms!*" exclaimed Grimaud.

The young men arose hastily and ran to their muskets.

This time there was a small band advancing, composed of twenty or twenty-five men, no longer pioneers, but soldiers of the garrison.

"Suppose we now return to the camp," said Porthos; "it seems to me that the match is not equal."

"Impossible, for three reasons," answered Athos. "The first is, because we have not finished our breakfast; the second, because we have still some important affairs to talk about; and the third, it will be still ten minutes before the hour elapses."

"But, nevertheless," said Aramis, "we must arrange a plan of battle."

"It is vastly simple," replied Athos. "As soon as the enemy is within musket-shot, we must fire; if he continues to advance, we must fire again; in fact, we must fire away as long as we have guns loaded. If the remnant of the band should then wish to mount to the assault, we must let the besiegers descend as far as the ditch, and then we must heave on their heads a large mass of the wall, which only keeps up now by a miracle of equilibrium."

"Bravo!" exclaimed Porthos. "Athos, you are undoubtedly a born generalissimo, and the cardinal, who thinks himself a great warrior, is a mere corporal to you."

"Gentlemen," said Athos, "do not waste your ammunition, I beseech you; let each pick out his man."

"I have mine," said D'Artagnan.

"And I mine," said Porthos.

"And I the same," said Aramis.

"Fire!" cried Athos.

The four guns made but one report and four men fell.

The drum then beat and the little band advanced to the charge.

The shots of the four friends were then fired without regularity, but invariably with the same deadly effect.

Yet, as though they had known the numerical weakness of their opponents, the Rochellais continued to advance at a quick pace.

At three other shots two men fell; yet the march of those who remained unwounded did not slacken.

Having reached the foot of the bastion, there were still twelve or fifteen of the enemy. A last discharge staggered, but did not arrest them. They leaped into the ditch and prepared to scale the breach.

"Now, my friends," said Athos, "let us finish them at one blow. To the wall! to the wall!"

And the four friends, assisted by Grimaud, set themselves to topple over with the barrels of their muskets an enormous mass of wall, which bowed as though the wind waved it, and loosening itself from its foundation, now fell with a tremendous crash into the ditch. A fearful cry was heard, a cloud of dust ascended toward the skies, and all was over.

"Can we have crushed them all from the first to the last?" said Athos.

"Faith, it looks very like it," replied D'Artagnan.

"No," said Porthos; "there are two or three of them escaping, quite crippled."

In fact, three or four of these unfortunate beings, covered with mire and blood, fled along the hollow way and regained the town. They were all that had not perished of the little band.

Athos looked at his watch.

"Gentlemen," said he, "we have been here an hour and now the wager is gained, but we will play our game triumphantly; besides, D'Artagnan has not yet told us his idea."

And the musketeer with his habitual coolness seated himself beside the remains of the breakfast.

"Would you like to hear my plan?" said D'Artagnan to his three companions, when, after the alarm which had had so fearful a termination for the little troop of Rochellais, they had resumed their places before the remnants of their meal.

"Yes," replied Athos; "you said you had an idea."

"Ah! I have it," exclaimed D'Artagnan. "I will go to England for the second time, will find His Grace of Buckingham and warn him of the plot which has been formed against his life."

"You will do no such thing, D'Artagnan," said Athos, coldly.

"Why not? Did I not go before?"

"Yes, but at that time we were not at war; at that time the Duke of Buckingham was an ally and not an enemy; what you now suggest would be denominated treason."

"But," said Porthos, "I fancy that I, in my turn, have also got an idea."

"Silence for M. Porthos's idea!" cried Aramis.

"I will ask leave of absence of M. de Treville on any pretext whatsoever that you can suggest—I am not very clever at excuses myself. The lady does not know me; I will get near her without exciting her alarm, and when I have found the beauty I will wring her neck."

"Ah," said Athos, "I really am somewhat disposed to suggest that we second Porthos's idea."

"Fie, fie!" exclaimed Aramis; "kill a woman! No! Listen, *I* have the right idea."

"Let us have your idea, Aramis," said Athos, who had much deference for the young musketeer.

"Let us tell all to the queen."

"Ah, faith, yes!" cried D'Artagnan and Porthos together; "I believe that we have found the true course at last."

"Announce it to the queen?" said Athos, "and how can we do that? Have we any connections at court? Can we send any one to Paris without its becoming known all over the camp? There are a hundred and forty leagues between us and Paris, and our letter will hardly have reached Angers before we ourselves shall be in a dungeon."

"As for getting a letter safely delivered to the queen,"

said Aramis, blushing, "I myself will undertake it. I know a very skillful person at Tours——"

Aramis stopped, seeing Athos smile.

"Well, will you not adopt this plan, Athos?" inquired D'Artagnan.

"I do not entirely reject it," replied Athos, "but I would merely observe to Aramis that he cannot himself leave the camp, and that with anybody but one of ourselves there will be not the slightest security that, two hours after the messenger has started, all the capucins, all the alguazils, all the black bonnets of the cardinal, will not know your letter by heart, and your very skillful person immediately arrested."

"Without calculating," added Porthos, "that the queen would try to save the Duke of Buckingham, but would leave *us* to our fate."

"Gentlemen," said D'Artagnan, "Porthos's objection is full of sense!"

"Ah, ha! what is going on in the town?" said Athos. "They are beating to arms."

The four friends listened and the sound of the drum reached their ears.

"You will see," continued Athos, "that they will send an entire regiment against us."

"You do not expect us to stand our ground against an entire regiment?" said Porthos.

"Why not?" replied the musketeer. "I am just in the humor and would hold it against an army, if we had only had the precaution to bring another dozen of wine!"

"Upon my word the drum sounds nearer," said D'Artagnan.

"Let them come," replied Athos; "there is a quarter of an hour's march between the town and this place. It is more time than we shall require to arrange our plans. If we go away from here we shall never again find such a convenient spot. And listen, gentlemen: the most appropriate idea in the world has come into my mind."

"Let us hear it."

Athos made a sign for his valet to come to him.

"Grimaud," said Athos, pointing to the dead bodies which lay in the bastion, "you will take these gentlemen, fix them upright against the wall, put their hats on their heads and place their muskets in their hands."

"Oh, great man!" cried D'Artagnan, "I understand you."

"You understand?" said Porthos.

"And you, Grimaud, do you understand?" inquired Aramis.

Grimaud gave a sign in the affirmative.

"It is all that is necessary," said Athos; "now let us return to my idea."

"I should like, however, to understand——" said Porthos.

"It is of no use."

"Yes, yes! Athos's idea!" cried D'Artagnan and Aramis at the same time.

"This lady, this woman, this creature, this viper, this demon, has a brother-in-law, I think you told me?"

"Yes, I even know him; and I believe that he has no great sympathy with his sister-in-law."

"There is no harm in that," replied Athos; "and if he detested her, even, it would be so much the more a virtue."

"In that case, we are fitted to a nicety."

"Nevertheless," said Porthos, "I should like to understand what Grimaud is about."

"Silence, Porthos!" cried Aramis.

"What is the name of this brother-in-law?"

"Lord de Winter."

"Where is he at present?"

"He returned to London on the first report of the war."

"Well, he is precisely the man we want," said Athos. "It is to him that we must give information; we must let him know that his sister-in-law is going to assassinate some one and entreat him not to lose sight of her. There must be in London, I should hope, some establishment like the Madelonnettes or the Magdalen; he must place his sister-in-law there and we shall then be at peace."

"Yes," said D'Artagnan, "until she gets out again."

"Ah, faith," said Athos, "you ask too much, D'Artagnan. I have given you all I have and I tell you now my budget is exhausted."

"I think it is the best plan we can devise," observed Aramis; "we will inform the queen and Lord de Winter at the same time."

"But by whom shall we convey the one letter to London and the other to Tours?"

"I answer for Bazin," replied Aramis.

"And I for Planchet," added D'Artagnan.

"In fact," said Porthos, "if we cannot leave the camp, our servants can."

"Certainly," added Aramis; "so we will write the letters this very day, give them sufficient money and send them on the journey."

"We will give them sufficient money?" said Athos; "then you have money, have you?"

The four friends looked at each other and a cloud passed over the brows which had been for an instant brightened.

"Attention!" cried D'Artagnan; "I see black and red points in movement below there. What were you saying about a regiment, Athos? It is a regular army."

"Faith, yes," replied Athos, "there they are. Do you see the crafty fellows who are advancing without drum or trumpet? Ah, ah! Have you finished, Grimaud?"

Grimaud gave a sign in the affirmative and pointed to a dozen dead bodies which he had placed in the most picturesque attitudes—some carrying arms, others seeming to take aim, others sword in hand.

"Bravo!" cried Athos; "that does credit to your imagination."

"It is all the same," said Porthos; "and yet I should like to understand it."

"Let us decamp first," said D'Artagnan; "you will understand afterward."

"One moment, gentlemen—wait one moment; let us give Grimaud time to take away the breakfast things."

"Ah!" said Aramis, "here are the black and red points becoming visibly larger and I am of D'Artagnan's opinion; I believe that we have no time to lose in regaining the camp."

"Faith," said Athos, "I have nothing more to say against a retreat; we betted for one hour and we have remained an hour and a half. There is nothing more to argue or communicate, so let us be off, gentlemen, let us be off."

Grimaud had already commenced his retreat with the basket and the fragments. The four friends followed behind him and took about a dozen steps.

"Ah! What the plague are we about, gentlemen?" exclaimed Athos.

"Have you forgotten anything?" inquired Aramis.

"The flag. Zounds! We must not leave a flag in the hands of the enemy, even when that flag is only a table-cloth."

And Athos rushed back into the bastion, mounted the platform and took down the flag.

But as the Rochellais had come within musket-shot, they opened a sharp fire upon this man who thus exposed himself, as if for amusement, to their discharge. It might have been fancied, however, that Athos bore a charmed life; the bullets whizzed around him, yet he stood unharmed.

Athos waved his standard as he turned his back on the town, and bowed toward the camp. Loud shouts resounded on both sides—shouts of anger from the one and from the other of enthusiasm.

A second discharge soon followed the first, and three balls, by passing through it, made a regular standard of the table-cloth.

They heard the whole camp exclaiming, "Come down come down!"

Athos slowly descended. His companions, who waited for him with anxiety, welcomed his reappearance with joy.

"Come along, Athos, come along," said D'Artagnan

"let us make haste. Now that we have found everything except money, it would be absurd to get killed."

But Athos persisted in his majestic walk, and his companions, finding all remonstrance useless, regulated their pace by his.

Grimaud and his basket formed the advance guard and were both soon out of range.

After a minute or two they heard the sound of furious firing.

"What is that?" asked Porthos; "at what are they firing? I do not hear the bullets whistle nor do I see anybody."

"They are firing at our *dead men!*" replied Athos.

"But our dead men will not return their fire."

"Exactly so. They will then believe that there is an ambuscade; they will deliberate and will afterward reconnoitre; and by the time they discover the trick we shall be beyond the reach of their fire. Thus you see it is unnecessary to give ourselves a fit of the pleurisy by overhaste."

"Oh! I understand now!" said the admiring Porthos.

"That's very fortunate," replied Athos, shrugging his shoulders.

The French, on their side, perceiving their adventurous comrades returning, uttered cries of frantic enthusiasm.

At length a fresh firing was heard, and this time the bullets were actually flattened on the stones around the four friends and whistled mournfully about their ears. The Rochellais had at last taken possession of the bastion.

"They are a set of awkward fellows," remarked Athos; "how many of them have we killed—a dozen?"

"Or fifteen."

"How many did we make jelly of?"

"Eight or ten."

"And in exchange for this we have not got a scratch. Ah! yes, though! What is the matter there with your hand, D'Artagnan? It is bleeding."

"It is nothing," replied D'Artagnan.

"Was it a spent ball?"

"No."

"What then?"

We have said that Athos loved D'Artagnan as his own son, and though of a gloomy and inflexible character, he sometimes manifested toward the young man a solicitude truly paternal.

"Merely a scratch," replied D'Artagnan. "I caught my fingers between two stones—that of the wall and that of my ring—and the skin is cut."

"See what it is to wear diamonds, my master," said Athos, contemptuously.

"Ah!" exclaimed Porthos, "there is a diamond, in fact; and why the plague, then, as there is a diamond, do we battle about having no money?"

"See, there, now," said Aramis.

"Well done, Porthos; this time you really have an idea."

"Certainly," continued Porthos, bridling up at Athos's compliment; "and since there is a diamond, let us sell it."

"But," said D'Artagnan, "it is the queen's diamond."

"One reason more," said Athos; "the queen saving the Duke of Buckingham, her lover: nothing can be more just; the queen saving us, her friends: nothing can be more moral. Let us sell the diamond. What does the abbé say? I do not ask Porthos's opinion—it is already given."

"Why, I think," said Aramis, blushing, "that as the ring does not come from a mistress and consequently is not a love token, D'Artagnan may sell it."

"My dear fellow, you speak like theology personified. So your advice is——"

"To sell the diamond," replied Aramis.

"Well," said D'Artagnan, gayly, "let us sell the diamond and say no more about it."

The fusillade still continued, but the friends were beyond its reach and the Rochellais seemed to be firing only for the satisfaction of their own pugnacity.

"Faith," said Athos, "it was quite time for this idea

of Porthos to present itself, for here we are at the camp. So now, gentlemen, not another word about this business. We are observed. They are coming to meet us and we shall be carried home in triumph."

In fact, as we have already said, the whole camp was in commotion. More than two thousand soldiers had witnessed, as at a theatre, the fortune-favored bravado of the four friends—a bravado of which they had been far from suspecting the true motive. Nothing could be heard but cries of "Long live the guards! Long live the musketeers!" M. de Busigny was the first who came to press the hand of Athos and to confess that he had lost his bet. The dragoon and the Swiss followed him, and all their comrades followed the dragoon and the Swiss. There was no end to the congratulations, shaking of hands, embraces and inextinguishable laughter at the Rochellais; and at last, the tumult was so great, that the cardinal supposed there was a mutiny, and sent La Houdiniere, the captain of his guards, to ascertain the cause of the disturbance. The incident was related to his messenger with all the warmth of enthusiasm.

"Well?" demanded the cardinal, on seeing La Houdiniere return.

"Well, my lord," replied the latter, "it is three musketeers and a guardsman, who laid a bet with M. de Busigny to go and breakfast in the bastion of St. Gervais; and who, whilst at breakfast, maintained their ground for two hours against the Rochellais and killed I know not how many of the enemy."

"Did you learn the names of these musketeers?"

"Yes, my lord."

"What are they?"

"Messieurs Athos, Porthos and Aramis."

"Always my three brave fellows!" muttered the cardinal. "And the guard?"

"M. d'Artagnan."

"My young madcap again! Decidedly these four men must be mine."

On the same evening the cardinal spoke to M. de

Treville of the exploit, which formed the subject of conversation throughout the whole camp. M. de Treville, who had heard the recital of the adventure from the lips of those who were its heroes, recounted it in all its particulars to his eminence, without forgetting the episode of the tablecloth flag.

"Very good, M. de Treville," said the cardinal; "give me this glorious standard, I entreat you. I will get three fleurs-de-lis embroidered on it in gold and will give it to you as the battle-flag of your company."

"My lord," said M. de Treville, "that would be unjust toward the guards. M. d'Artagnan does not belong to me, but to M. des Essarts."

"Well, then, take him yourself," said the cardinal "it is hardly fair that these four brave soldiers who love each other so well should not serve in the same company."

On the same evening M. de Treville announced this good news to the three musketeers and to D'Artagnan, inviting them all four to breakfast with him on the following day.

D'Artagnan could not contain himself for joy. We know that the dream of his life had been to be a musketeer.

The three friends were also profoundly delighted.

"Faith," said D'Artagnan to Athos, "yours was a triumphant idea; and as you said, we have gained glory by it, besides being able to hold a conversation of the greatest importance."

"Which we may henceforth renew without suspicion, for, with God's help, we shall henceforth be looked upon as cardinalists."

On the same evening D'Artagnan went to pay his respects to M. des Essarts and to inform him of his promotion.

M. des Essarts, who had great affection for D'Artagnan, offered him any assistance that he might require as this change of regiment brought with it the expense of a new equipment.

D'Artagnan declined this aid, but thinking the opportunity a good one, he requested him to ascertain the value of the diamond which he placed in his hands, stating that he wished him to turn it into money.

At eight o'clock the next morning M. des Essarts's valet came to D'Artagnan and handed him a bag containing seven thousand livres in gold. It was the price of the queen's diamond.

CHAPTER XLVIII.

A FAMILY AFFAIR.

Athos had hit upon the right expression. It was necessary to make Buckingham's *a family affair!* A family affair was not subjected to the investigation of the cardinal; a family affair concerned no one; they might occupy themselves before all the world about a family affair.

Aramis had found the idea—the valets!

Porthos had found the means—the diamond!

D'Artagnan alone, generally the most inventive of the four, contributed nothing save the sinews of war; but we must confess that the very name of Milady paralyzed him.

The breakfast at M. de Treville's was charmingly gay. D'Artagnan had already got his uniform. As he was about the same size as Aramis, and as Aramis, being so handsomely paid, as may be remembered, by the booksellers who had bought his poem, had doubly furnished himself with everything, he had accommodated his friend with a complete equipment.

D'Artagnan would have been supremely happy had he not seen Her Ladyship like a dark cloud on the horizon.

After breakfast they agreed to meet again in the evening at Athos's quarters, in order to terminate their arrangements.

D'Artagnan passed the day in displaying his musketeer's uniform in every avenue throughout the camp.

At the appointed time in the evening the four friends

assembled. There were but three things to settle: what they should write to the lady's brother-in-law; what they should write to the clever person at Tours; and which of the valets should be the bearer of the letters.

For the latter purpose each offered his own. Athos vaunted the discretion of Grimaud, who only spoke when his master permitted him to open his mouth. Porthos boasted of the strength of Musqueton, who was big enough to drub four men of ordinary dimensions. Aramis, confident in the address of Bazin, made a pompous eulogium on his candidate, and lastly, D'Artagnan had entire confidence in Planchet's bravery and recalled to their minds how well he had behaved in their most hazardous encounter at Boulogne.

These four virtues for a long time contended for mastery and gave occasion for some magnificent speeches which we shall not report lest they should be deemed tiresome.

"Unhappily," said Athos, "it is necessary that he whom we send should possess in himself all the four qualities united."

"But where can we find such a servant?"

"It is impossible, I know," said Athos, "so take Grimaud."

"Take Musqueton."

"Take Bazin."

"Take Planchet; he is brave and skillful, so there are two qualities out of the four."

"Gentlemen," said Aramis, "the chief thing is not to know which of our four valets is the most discreet, the strongest, the most skillful, or the bravest, but to find out which of them is the fondest of money."

"Aramis talks sound sense," said Athos; "it is necessary to calculate upon the defects of mankind and not upon their virtues. M. Abbé, you are a great moralist."

"Unquestionably so," said Aramis; "for we need to be well served, not only to succeed, but that we may not fail; since in case of failure it will endanger the head, not of the valet——"

"Not so loud, Aramis," said Athos.

"You are right—not of the valet," resumed Aramis, "but of the master or even of the masters. Are our valets sufficiently devoted to us to hazard their lives for us? No."

"Faith," said D'Artagnan, "I would almost answer for Planchet."

"Well, then, my dear friend, add to that devotedness a good round sum which will secure him some independence, and instead of answering for him once you may answer twice."

"*Diantre!* you will be deceived just as much," said Athos, who was an optimist when reasoning on events and a pessimist when reasoning on men; "they will promise everything to get money, and when occasion comes fear will prevent them acting. Once taken they will be imprisoned, and when imprisoned they will confess everything. What the plague! we are not children! To get to England" (Athos lowered his voice) "we must pass through the whole of France, which is thickly sown with the spies and creatures of the cardinal. Then a passport is necessary for embarkation; then English must be spoken to find the way to London. Ah, I see that it is a very difficult affair!"

"Not at all," said D'Artagnan, who was very anxious that the thing should be accomplished; "I can see that it is easy enough. We know without being told, gad! that if we wrote to Lord de Winter, loudly proclaiming all manner of enormities concerning the cardinal——"

"Not so loud!" said Athos.

"Or communicating state secrets or intrigues," continued D'Artagnan, acting on his friend's warning, "we know, without a prophet, that we should all be broken on the wheel. But, for God's sake, do not forget what you have said yourself, Athos—that we only write about a family affair—that we write with the sole motive of getting this lady, as soon as she arrives in London, placed in such a situation that she cannot hurt us. I

would therefore write him a letter in something like these terms."

"Now let us hear," said Aramis, putting on a critical face beforehand.

"Sir, and dear friend——"

"Ah, yes! 'dear friend,' to an Englishman!" broke in Athos. "Well begun! Bravo, D'Artagnan! For that word alone you will be quartered instead of broken on the wheel."

"Well, then, I would say 'Sir'—quite short."

"You might even say 'My lord,'" rejoined Athos, who thought a good deal of propriety.

"'My lord,—Do you remember the little enclosure for goats, near the Luxembourg?'"

"Good! The Luxembourg, indeed! That will be taken for an allusion to the queen-mother. How very ingenious!" said Athos.

"Well, then, we will simply say, 'My lord: Do you remember a certain little inclosure where your life was saved?'"

"My dear D'Artagnan," said Athos, "you never will be anything but a vastly bad composer. Where your life was saved! For shame! It is not dignified; no one reminds a gallant man of such services. A benefit reproached is always an insult."

"Ah, my dear fellow!" said D'Artagnan, "you are unbearable, and if one must write under your critical eye I renounce it."

"And you do wisely. Handle the sword and the musket, my dear boy—you perform those exercises admirably well—but give up the pen to the abbé; it is his vocation."

"Yes," said Porthos, "give up the pen to Aramis, who writes theses in Latin."

"Very well, so be it," answered D'Artagnan. "Compose this note for us, Aramis; but by our holy father the pope, mind what you are about, for I shall criticise you in turn, I warn you."

"I ask nothing better," said Aramis, with that natural

confidence which every poet has in himself; "but first make me acquainted with all the circumstances. I have indeed heard, now and then, that his sister-in-law is a demirep. I have, in fact, got proof of it by listening to her conversation with the cardinal."

"Zounds! Not so loud, then," cried Athos.

"But," continued Aramis, "the particulars I do not know."

"Nor I either," said Porthos.

D'Artagnan and Athos looked at one another for some time in silence. At last Athos, having collected himself, and become even paler than usual, gave a sign of assent; and D'Artagnan understood that he might speak.

"Well, then, here is what you must write," resumed D'Artagnan.

"My lord,—Your sister-in-law is a wicked woman who wished to have you killed in order to obtain your inheritance. But she could not marry your brother, being already married in France and having been—" D'Artagnan stopped, as if he were seeking for the right word, and looked at Athos.

"Driven away by her husband," said Athos.

"Because she had been branded," continued D'Artagnan.

"Bah!" cried Porthos; "impossible! And did she wish to have her brother-in-law killed?"

"Yes."

"And she was married?" demanded Aramis.

"Yes."

"And her husband found out that she had a fleur-de-lis on her shoulder?" cried Porthos.

"Yes."

Three times had Athos uttered this "yes," each time in a more gloomy tone.

"And who saw this fleur-de-lis?" demanded Aramis.

"D'Artagnan and myself, or, rather, to observe the chronological order, I and D'Artagnan," replied Athos.

"And the husband of this horrible creature is yet alive?" inquired Aramis.

"He still lives."

"You are quite sure of it?"

"I am certain of it."

There was a moment of profound silence, during which each felt himself affected according to his disposition.

"This time," said Athos, first breaking the silence, "D'Artagnan has given us a good beginning, and it is that which we must write first."

"The devil!" said Aramis, "you are right, Athos, and the composition is difficult. The chancellor himself would be puzzled to compose an epistle of this significance, and yet the chancellor draws up a criminal process very agreeably. Never mind—be quiet—I will write."

Aramis took the pen, reflected for a few moments, and then wrote eight or ten lines in a charming little feminine hand; then, in a soft and slow voice, as if every word had been scrupulously weighed, he read as follows:

"My Lord,—The person who writes these few lines had the honor of crossing swords with you in a little inclosure in the Rue de l'Enfer. As you have been kind enough, since, often to declare yourself the friend of that person, he is bound to acknowledge that friendship by an important warning. You have twice escaped being the victim of a near relation, whom you consider your heiress, because you know not that, before contracting her marriage in England, she had already been married in France. But the third time, which is this, you might become her victim. Your relation has left La Rochelle for England during the night. Watch for her arrival, for she has great and terrible designs. If you wish really to know of what she is capable, read her past life on her left shoulder."

"Well, that is admirable," said Athos; "and you have the pen of a secretary of state, my dear Aramis. De Winter will keep a good lookout now, provided he receives the letter; and should it ever fall into the

hands of his eminence we could not be compromised. But as the valet whom we send might make us believe he had been to London, whilst he only stopped at Châtellerault, give him only half the sum, promising him the other half in exchange for the answer. Have you the diamond ? " continued Athos.

" I have better than that," replied D'Artagnan ; " I have the money ; " and he threw the bag upon the table.

At the sound of the gold Aramis lifted up his eyes, Porthos started, and as for Athos, he remained unmoved.

" How much is there in this little bag ? " said he.

" Seven thousand livres, in louis of twelve francs."

" Seven thousand livres ! " exclaimed Porthos. " Was that paltry little diamond worth seven thousand livres ? "

" So it seems," said Athos, " since there they are. I presume that our friend D'Artagnan has not put in any of his own."

" But, gentlemen," continued D'Artagnan, " we forget the queen. Let us take some little care of the health of her dear Buckingham. It is the least that we owe her."

" That is true," said Athos ; " but this concerns Aramis."

" Well," replied the latter, coloring, " what must I do ? "

" Why," replied Athos, " it is very simple ; just compose a second letter to that clever person who lives at Tours."

Aramis resumed the pen, began to reflect again, and wrote the following lines, which he submitted immediately to the approbation of his friends :

" My Dear Cousin——"

" Ah, ha ! " said Athos, " this clever person is your relation ! "

" Cousin-german," replied Aramis.

" Be it cousin, then."

Aramis continued :

"My Dear Cousin,—His eminence the cardinal, whom may God preserve for the happiness of France and the confusion of the enemies of the realm, is about to exterminate the rebellious heretics of La Rochelle. It is probable that the aid of the English fleet will not even arrive in time within sight of the place. I might almost venture to say that I am certain his grace of Buckingham will be prevented from leaving England by some great event. His eminence is the most illustrious politician of time past, time present and most probably of time to come. He would extinguish the sun, if the sun were in his way. Give this happy intelligence to your sister, my dear cousin. I dreamed that this cursed Englishman was dead. I do not remember whether it was by poison or the sword, only I am sure that he was dead; and you know that my dreams are always fulfilled. Be assured, therefore, that you will shortly see me return."

"Wonderfully good!" said Athos. "You are the king of poets, my dear Aramis; you speak like the apocalypse, yet are as true as the gospel. There only remains, now, the address to put upon this letter."

"That is easy enough," said Aramis.

He folded the letter in a coquettish manner and wrote:

"Mademoiselle Michon, seamstress, at Tours."

The three friends looked at one another and laughed. They were caught.

"Now, gentlemen," said Aramis, "you understand that Bazin alone can convey this letter to Tours. My cousin knows only Bazin and will trust to no one else. To send any other messenger would only insure a failure. Besides, Bazin is ambitious and learned. Bazin has read history, gentlemen; he knows that Sextus the Fifth became pope after having kept swine; and as he intends to enter the church at the same time with myself, he does not despair of becoming himself a pope, or at any rate a cardinal. You will understand that a

man who has such views will not allow himself to be caught, or, if he should be caught, will rather suffer martyrdom than speak."

"Very well," said D'Artagnan, "I allow you Bazin with all my heart; only allow me Planchet. Her Ladyship once sent him away well cudgeled. Now Planchet has a good memory, and I promise you that if he thought revenge possible, he would allow himself to be broken on the wheel rather than not effect it. If the business at Tours belongs peculiarly to you, that in London is peculiarly mine. So I entreat you to choose Planchet, who has also already been to London with me, and knows how to say very correctly: 'London, sir, if you please;' and, 'My master, Lord d'Artagnan.' You may be quite sure that with this knowledge he will find his way there and back."

"In that case," said Athos, "Planchet must receive seven hundred livres for each half of his journey and Bazin three hundred. That will reduce the sum to five thousand livres. We shall each take a thousand livres to spend as we please, and we shall leave a fund of a thousand in the care of the abbé for extraordinary expenses and our common wants. What do you say to that?"

"My dear Athos," said Aramis, "you speak like Nestor, who was, as everybody knows, the wisest of the Greeks."

"Then it is settled," continued Athos; "Planchet and Bazin will set off. After all, I am not sorry to keep Grimaud; he is accustomed to my ways and I can depend upon him. Yesterday's expedition must have rather shaken him already, and this voyage would undo him altogether."

Planchet was sent for to receive his instructions. He had already received some intimation of the journey from his master, who had announced to him, first, the glory, then the profit, and lastly, the danger.

"I shall carry the letter in the lining of my coat," said Planchet, "and swallow it if I am taken."

"But then you will be unable to perform your commission," said D'Artagnan.

"You will give me a copy this evening which I shall know by heart to-morrow."

D'Artagnan looked at his friends, as much as to say: "Well, did I not tell you so?"

"Now," continued he, addressing Planchet, "you have eight days to reach Lord de Winter and eight days to return here; that is sixteen days in all. If on the sixteenth day from your departure you have not arrived at eight o'clock in the evening, not a farthing more money shall you have, though you were only later by five minutes."

"Then, sir," said Planchet, "buy me a watch."

"Here, take this," said Athos, with heedless generosity, giving him his own, "and be a brave lad. Consider that if you talk, if you babble, if you loiter, you will sacrifice the head of your master, who has so much confidence in your fidelity that he has answered for you to us. But remember, also, that if by any fault of yours any such calamity should come upon D'Artagnan, I will hunt you out wherever you may be and will completely perforate you."

"Oh, sir!" cried Planchet, humiliated at the suspicion and particularly alarmed by the calmness of the musketeer.

"And I," said Porthos, rolling his great eyes, "remember that I will skin you alive."

"Ah, sir!"

"And I," said Aramis, with his soft and melodious voice, "remember that I will roast you at a slow fire, as if you were an uncultivated savage."

"Ah, sir!"

And Planchet began to cry; but we cannot venture to say whether it was from terror on account of the threats he had heard or from being affected at seeing so close a union of hearts between the four friends.

D'Artagnan took his hand. "You see, Planchet," said he, "that these gentlemen speak thus from affec-

tion toward me; but notwithstanding all this, they esteem you."

"Ah! sir," said Planchet, "I shall either succeed or I shall be cut into quarters; and were I even quartered, you may rely upon it that not one piece of me will speak."

It was decided that Planchet should start the next day at eight in the morning, in order that, as he said, he might during the night have time to learn the letter by heart. He gained just twelve hours by this arrangement, as he was to return at eight o'clock in the evening of the sixteenth day.

Just as he was about to mount his horse in the morning, D'Artagnan, who felt his heart incline toward Buckingham, took Planchet aside.

"Listen," said he: "When you have delivered your letter to Lord de Winter and he has read it, say to him, 'Watch over the Duke of Buckingham, for they are seeking to assassinate him.' But this, do you see, Planchet, is a thing of such momentous importance that I would not even confess to my friends that I have confided the secret to you; and even for a captain's commission I would not write it down."

"Be easy, sir," said Planchet; "you shall see whether you can trust me."

Mounted on an excellent horse, which he was to leave at twenty leagues from La Rochelle, to take the post, Planchet went off at a gallop, his heart a little shaken by the threats of the musketeers, but, on the whole, in a most favorable state of mind.

Bazin left the next morning for Tours and was allowed eight days for his expedition.

The four friends, during the whole time of their absence, had, as may well be supposed, their eyes more than ever on the watch, their noses in the wind and their ears upon the alert. The days were consumed in trying to catch every report, to watch the motions of the cardinal and to scent out the couriers who arrived. More than once an unconquerable anxiety seized them

on being sent for on some unexpected service. They had also to be watchful of their own safety: Her Ladyship was a phantom, who, having once appeared to any one, would never more allow him to sleep in tranquillity.

On the morning of the eighth day, Bazin, fresh as ever and smiling as usual, entered the room at the Parpaillot just as the four friends were going to breakfast, saying, according to the agreement they had made:

"M. Aramis, here is the answer from your cousin."

The four friends exchanged a joyful glance. Half their work was done; it is true that it was the shortest and the easiest half.

Aramis took the letter, blushing in spite of himself. The writing was vulgar and the spelling wretched.

"Good God," said he, laughing, "I decidedly despair of her. This poor Michon will never write like M. de Voiture!"

"Who does that mean—'this poor Michon?'" asked the Swiss, who was getting into a gossip with the four friends when the letter was brought.

"Oh, my God! less than nothing," replied Aramis. "She is a charming little seamstress with whom I was very much in love and from whom I have begged a few lines in her own handwriting, by way of remembrance."

"Egad!" said the Swiss, "if she is as ladylike as her own penmanship you must be a happy fellow, comrade."

Aramis read the letter and handed it to Athos.

"Just see what she writes, Athos," said he.

Athos threw a glance over the letter and then, to destroy any suspicions which might have been awakened, read it aloud:

"COUSIN,—My sister and I understand dreams very well, and we are shockingly frightened at them; but of yours it may be said, I hope—all dreams are false. Adieu! Take care of yourself and let us hear of you from time to time.

"AGLAE MICHON."

"What dream is she talking about?" asked the dragoon, who had come up whilst they were reading the letter.

"Yes, what dream?" said the Swiss.

"Oh! Egad!" said Aramis, "it is plain enough; about a dream of mine that I told them."

"Ah, yes," said the Swiss; "it is quite natural to tell one's dreams; but for my part I never dream at all."

"You are very fortunate," said Athos, rising, "and I wish I could say the same thing."

"Never," repeated the Swiss, delighted that a man like Athos should envy him in anything; "never, never!"

D'Artagnan, seeing Athos rise, did the same, took his arm and left the room.

Porthos and Aramis remained behind to face the gossip of the Swiss and the dragoon.

As for Bazin, he went to sleep upon a truss of straw, and as he had more imagination than the Swiss, he dreamed that M. Aramis, who had become pope, was placing on his head a cardinal's hat.

But as we have already said, Bazin had by his happy return removed only a part of the uneasiness which tormented the four friends. The days of expectation are always long, and D'Artagnan, especially, could have sworn that each of these days was eight-and-forty hours long. He forgot the unavoidable delays of navigation; he exaggerated the power of Her Ladyship; he gave to this woman, who appeared to him to resemble a demon, auxiliaries as supernatural as herself; and he fancied at every noise that they were coming to arrest him or were bringing Planchet to be confronted with himself and his friends. And more than that, his extraordinary confidence in the worthy Picard diminished day by day. This anxiety was so powerful that it affected Porthos and Aramis. Athos alone remained unmoved, as though no danger filled the air around him and he breathed in his habitual atmosphere.

On the sixteenth day particularly, these signs of agi-

tation were so perceptible in D'Artagnan and his two friends that they could not remain in one place and wandered about like shadows on the road by which Planchet was expected to return.

"Really," said Athos, "you are not men, you are only children, to let a woman frighten you so much. And, after all, what is that you fear? To be imprisoned? Well, we should be released from prison, as Madame Bonancieux has been. To be beheaded? Why, we gladly expose ourselves every day in the trenches to worse than that, for a bullet might break a leg; and I am quite sure that a surgeon puts one to more pain in amputating a thigh, than an executioner in cutting off one's head. So wait calmly; in two, four, six hours at the latest, Planchet will be here. He has given us his promise, and I for my part have great confidence in the promise of Planchet, who seems to me a very worthy lad."

"But if he should not come?" said D'Artagnan.

"Well and if he should not come he has been delayed, that's all. He may have fallen from his horse; he may have made a somersault over a bridge; he may have brought on pleurisy by running too quickly. Come, gentlemen, let us allow for accident. Life is a long chaplet of little miseries which the philosopher shakes with a laugh. Be philosophers like me, gentlemen; come around the table and let us drink. Nothing gives the future so rosy a hue as to look at it through a glass of chambertin."

"That is all very good," replied D'Artagnan; "but I am weary of imagining every time I drink that the wine may have come from Her Ladyship's cellar."

"You are very fastidious," said Athos. "Such a beautiful woman!"

"A woman with a brand!" said Porthos, with his horse-laugh.

Athos started, passed his hand over his forehead to wipe off the perspiration, and arose in his turn, with a nervous agitation that he was unable to restrain.

The day, however, glided on and the evening came more slowly, but at last it did come. The taverns were full of customers. Athos, who had pocketed his share of the diamond, now scarcely ever left the Parpaillot. He had found in M. de Busigny, who, moreover, had given them a superb dinner, a partner worthy of himself. They were playing together, according to custom, when the clock struck seven; they heard the patrols passing on their way to double the sentinels. At half-past seven the drums beat the retreat.

"We are lost," whispered D'Artagnan in Athos's ear.

"You mean to say that we *have* lost," replied Athos with great tranquillity, drawing at the same time ten pistoles from his pocket and throwing them upon the table. "Come, gentlemen," continued he, "that is the last drum; let us go to bed."

And Athos left the Parpaillot, followed by D'Artagnan. Aramis came behind, giving his arm to Porthos; Aramis was mouthing verses, and Porthos from time to time tore a few hairs from his mustache in token of despair. But behold, suddenly in the darkness there appeared the shadow of a form familiar to D'Artagnan and a well-known voice said to him,—

"Sir, I have brought you your cloak, for it is cold this evening."

"Planchet!" exclaimed D'Artagnan, intoxicated with joy.

"Planchet!" exclaimed Aramis and Porthos.

"Well—yes, Planchet," said Athos; "what is there surprising in that? He promised to be back by eight o'clock and it is now just striking eight. Bravo, Planchet! you are a man of your word, and if ever you leave your master I shall keep a place for you in my service."

"Oh, no, never!" said Planchet; "I shall never leave M. d'Artagnan."

And at the same moment D'Artagnan felt Planchet slip a small note into his hand.

D'Artagnan had a great longing to embrace Planchet,

but he was afraid such a mark of delight conferred upon his valet in the public street would look rather odd to any passer-by, so he restrained himself. "I have got the letter," said he to Athos and his friends.

"Very well," said Athos, "let us go to our quarters and read it."

The letter burnt the hand of D'Artagnan. He wished to hurry on, but Athos kept a firm hold of his arm and the young man was compelled to regulate his speed by that of his friend.

They reached their tent at last and lighted a lamp; and whilst Planchet stood at the door to see that the four friends were not interrupted, D'Artagnan with a trembling hand broke the seal and opened the long-looked-for letter.

It contained half a line of writing, truly British, and of a brevity truly Spartan:

"Thank you; be easy."

Athos took the letter from D'Artagnan's hand, put it to the lamp, lighted it, and did not quit his hold until it was reduced to ashes. Then, calling Planchet:

"Now, my boy," said he, "you have a right to the other seven hundred livres; but you did not run much risk with such a letter as that."

"Nevertheless, I have invented a great many ways of securing it," replied Planchet.

"Well," said D'Artagnan, "tell us all about it."

"But it is a long story, sir," answered he.

"You are right, Planchet," said Athos; "besides, the last drum has sounded and we shall be observed if we burn our light longer than other people."

"Well, then, let us go to bed," said D'Artagnan; "sleep well, Planchet!"

"Faith, sir, it will be the first time in sixteen days."

"And for me also," said D'Artagnan.

"And for me, too!" exclaimed Porthos.

"And me, too!" re-echoed Aramis.

"Well, shall I confess the truth? and for me, too!" said Athos.

CHAPTER XLIX.

FATALITY.

In the meantime Milady—intoxicated with rage and roaring on the vessel's deck like an excited lioness—had been even tempted to cast herself into the sea; for she could not bring herself to brook the thought that she had been insulted by D'Artagnan and threatened by Athos, and was now quitting France without having obtained revenge. So insupportable had this idea at last become that, at the risk of the most terrible consequences to herself, she had entreated the captain to land her on the French coast. But the captain, anxious to escape from his false position—where he was placed between the English and French cruisers, like a bat between the rats and birds—was in great haste to reach England. He obstinately refused, therefore, to obey what he regarded as the whim of a capricious woman. He promised, however, to his passenger, who had been particularly recommended to his care by the cardinal, to land her at some port in Brittany, either Brest or Lorient, should the weather and the French permit. But in the meantime the wind was contrary and the sea rough; they tacked about continually, and nine days after her departure from Clarente, Her Ladyship, pale from grief and rage, saw only the blue shores of Finisterre.

She calculated that to traverse that angle of France and return to the cardinal would take her at least three days; add one day for landing, and that would make four. Add these four to the nine already elapsed and here were thirteen lost days—thirteen days, during which so many important events might have occurred in London. She considered that the cardinal would un-

doubtedly be furious at her return and consequently would be more disposed to listen to any accusations which might be made against her than to those which she might make against others. She therefore did not renew her entreaties and permitted the captain to carry her past Lorient and Brest; and he on his part was careful not to remind her of her wishes. She thus continued her voyage, and on the very day that Planchet embarked at Portsmouth to return to France, the messenger of his eminence entered the port triumphantly.

The whole town was in a state of extraordinary excitement. Four large ships, recently built, had just been launched into the sea. Standing on the jetty, covered with gold and glittering as usual with diamonds and precious stones, his hat adorned with a white plume which drooped upon his shoulder, Buckingham was visible, surrounded by a staff almost as brilliant as himself.

It was one of those few and fine summer days when Englishmen remember that there is a sun. The pale but still splendid luminary was just dropping below the horizon, making the heavens and the sea crimson with bands of fire and casting a last golden ray on the towers and the old buildings of the town, the windows of which gleamed as with the reflection of a conflagration. Her Ladyship—as she inhaled the sea breeze, which is fresher and more balmy in the vicinity of land, and as she contemplated all those mighty preparations which she was ordered to destroy and all the might of that armament against which she, a woman, had come to contend alone, with a few bags of gold—mentally compared herself to Judith, the fearful Jewess, when she penetrated into the camp of the Assyrians and saw the enormous mass of chariots, of horses, of men, and of arms, which one movement of her hand was to dissipate like a cloud of smoke.

They entered the Roads, but just as they were making ready to cast anchor, a small, strongly armed cutter presented itself as a coast-guard, approached the merchant-vessel and put off its boat, which was steered

toward them. The boat contained an officer, a lieutenant and eight men. The officer alone came on board, where he was received with all the respect which his uniform inspired.

The officer conversed for a few minutes with the captain and inspected some papers which he brought with him; and then on the captain's order all the crew and passengers of the vessel were mustered upon the deck. When this had been done the officer inquired aloud as to where the brig had come from, what had been its course, and where it had put in; and to all these questions the captain replied satisfactorily, without hesitation or difficulty. The officer then began to examine all the persons on deck, one after the other, and stopping at Her Ladyship, he looked at her very earnestly, but without uttering a single word.

Having returned to the captain and made some new communication to him, the officer, as if he had now taken command of the vessel, gave an order which the crew immediately executed. By this means the vessel was put again in motion, but it was still escorted by the little cutter, which kept beside it, menacing its broadside with the mouths of her cannons; the boat followed in the vessel's wake, an object scarcely visible behind the enormous mass.

Whilst the officer had been examining Her Ladyship, she, as may well be imagined, had on her side not failed to scrutinize him most intently. But however much this woman with her eye of flame was accustomed to read the hearts of those whose secret she wished to discover, she had found at last a countenance so perfectly impassible that no insight followed her investigation.

The officer who stood before her and silently studied her with so much care might be about twenty-six years of age. He had a very fair complexion, with blue eyes, rather deeply set. His fine and clear-cut mouth continued perfectly motionless in its classic lines. His well developed chin denoted that strength of will which in

the prevailing English character is commonly no better than obstinacy, and his slightly receding forehead—such as is accorded to poets, to enthusiasts and to soldiers—was scantily shaded by short, thin hair, which, as well as the beard that covered the lower part of his face, was of a deep chestnut color.

When they entered the harbor it was already dark. The fog increased the obscurity and formed around the lanterns of the ships and jetties a circle similar to that which surrounds the moon when it threatens rainy weather. The air was melancholy, damp and cold.

Her Ladyship, firm as she was, felt herself shivering in spite of all her efforts.

The officer had had all of Her Ladyship's packages pointed out to him and ordered them to be put into the boat; after which, offering his hand to assist her, he requested her to descend herself.

Her Ladyship looked at the man and hesitated.

"Who are you, sir," said she, "who are so good as to trouble yourself so particularly about me?"

"You may see, madame, from my uniform, that I am an officer in the English navy," replied the young man.

"But is it usual for the officers of the English navy to put themselves at the command of their countrywomen when they approach a British port and to display their gallantry so far as to conduct them on shore?"

"Yes, Milady, it is the custom—not from gallantry, but prudence—that in time of war strangers must be conducted to a certain appointed hotel, in order that they may, until every information be obtained concerning them, remain under the inspection of the government."

These words were uttered with the most exact politeness and the most perfect calmness, and yet they did not convince Her Ladyship.

"But I am not a foreigner, sir," said she, in an accent as pure as was ever uttered between Portsmouth and Manchester. "My name is Lady Clarick, and this proceeding——"

"This proceeding is general, Milady, and you will in vain endeavour to escape it."

"I will follow you, then, sir."

And accepting the officer's hand, she began to descend the ladder, at the bottom of which the boat was waiting. The officer followed her. A large cloak was spread in the stern; the officer made her seat herself on it and placed himself at her side.

"Give way!" said he to the sailors.

The eight oars all fell into the water at the same instant and the boat seemed to fly along the surface of the sea. In five minutes they reached the shore. The officer sprang upon the quay and gave his hand to Her Ladyship. A carriage was waiting for them.

"Is this carriage for us?" demanded the lady.

"Yes, madame," replied the officer.

"Then the hotel is at some distance?"

"At the other end of the town."

"Let us go," said Her Ladyship.

She then entered the carriage with a resolute step.

Having superintended the safe packing of the baggage, the officer took his place beside Her Ladyship and closed the carriage door.

Then, without any orders being given to him or any indication where he was to go, the coachman set off at a gallop and was soon threading the streets of the town.

So strange a reception naturally supplied Her Ladyship with abundant matter for reflection. And seeing that the young officer did not appear at all inclined to enter into conversation, she leaned back in one of the corners of the carriage and reviewed through her mind, one after the other, all the suppositions which came to her.

But in about a quarter of an hour, surprised at the length of their journey, she looked out of the window to observe where they were going. She could no longer see any houses, but trees were visible in the darkness like vast black phantoms chasing one another.

Milady shuddered.

"But we have left the town, sir," said she.

The young officer remained silent.

"I positively declare, sir, that I will go no further if you do not tell me whither you are conveying me."

This threat produced no reply.

"Ah, it is too much!" exclaimed Her Ladyship. "Help, help!"

No voice responded to her cries. The carriage continued its rapid course. The officer seemed to be a statue.

Her ladyship gazed on the officer with one of those terrible glances which were peculiar to her own face and which so rarely failed of their effect. Passion make her eyes positively sparkle in the gloom, but the young man continued perfectly immovable.

She then attempted to open the door and throw herself out.

"Take care, madame," coldly observed the young man; "you will kill yourself if you leap out."

The lady resumed her seat, foaming with rage. The officer leaned forward, looked at her in his turn, and seemed surprised to find a countenance, before so beautiful, now so convulsed with rage as to have become almost hideous. The crafty creature, comprehending that she should sacrifice her own interests by thus betraying her true nature, at once composed her features and in a beseeching voice said:

"For Heaven's sake, sir, tell me if it be to yourself, or to your government, or to an enemy, that I am to impute this violence that is inflicted on me?"

"No violence is inflicted, madame, and that which has befallen you is the result of a very simple measure which we are forced to pursue toward all those who land in England."

"Then you do not know me, sir?"

"It is the first time that I have had the honor of seeing you."

"And, upon your honor, you have no cause of enmity against me?"

"None whatever, I swear!"

There was so much calmness, so much serenity, so much gentleness in the young man's voice, that Her Ladyship was reassured.

At last, after about an hour's journey, the carriage stopped at an iron gate at the entrance of a narrow road, which led to a gloomy looking, massive and isolated castle. And as the carriage wheels rolled over a soft gravel Her Ladyship heard a mighty roaring which she recognized as the sound of the sea breaking upon a rocky coast.

The carriage passed under two arches and stopped at last in a square and gloomy courtyard. The door was almost immediately opened, the young officer leaped lightly out, presented his hand to Her Ladyship, who leaned upon it and got out, in her turn, with great calmness.

"So, I am a prisoner," said she, looking around, and then fixing her eyes on the young man with the most gracious smile imaginable. "But it will not be for long, I am certain," added she. "My own conscience and your politeness give me that assurance, sir."

Flattering as the compliment might be, the officer made no reply, but drawing from his pocket a small silver whistle, like those used by boatswains on board of men-of-war, he sounded it three times, in three different modulations. Several men immediately appeared; they unharnessed the horses and took the carriage into a coach-house.

The officer, still preserving the same calm politeness, invited his prisoner to enter the castle. The latter, with the same smile upon her countenance, took his arm and passed with him under a low arched doorway, which led them through a vault lighted only at the end, to a stone staircase, winding around a pillar of the same material. They then stopped before a massive door, which, upon the application of a key that the young man carried slowly swung upon its hinges and opened into the apartment intended for Her Ladyship.

With one glance the prisoner scanned the minutest

particulars of this room. It was a chamber, the furniture of which was at the same time very suitable for a prison and very severe for the habitation of the free. But the bars to the windows and the locks outside the doors decided the question in favor of the prison. For an instant this creature, although hardened from the most vigorous sources, lost all her strength of mind. She sank into a seat, folded her arms, drooped her head and waited in momentary expectation of seeing a judge enter to examine her.

But no one came except two or three marines, who brought in her baggage, and having deposited it in a corner, withdrew without uttering a word.

The officer presided over all these details with the same calmness which Her Ladyship had invariably observed, not speaking a syllable and enforcing obedience merely by a gesture of his hand or a note from his whistle. One would have said that between this man and his inferiors vocal language either had never existed or had become unnecessary.

Her Ladyship could at last no longer restrain herself and she thus broke the silence :

" In Heaven's name, sir," she exclaimed, " what does all this mean ? Resolve my perplexity ; I have courage to face any danger which I can see coming, any misfortune which I understand. Where am I and why am I here ? Am I free ? Wherefore these bars and doors ? Am I a prisoner ? What crime have I committed ? "

" You are here, madame, in the apartment destined for you. I was ordered to go and arrest you at sea and to conduct you to this castle. I have accomplished that order, I believe, with the rigid exactness of an officer, but at the same time with the courtesy of a gentleman. There terminates, at least, for the present, the charge with which I have been intrusted concerning you. The remainder devolves upon another person."

" And this other person—who is he ? " demanded Her Ladyship ; " can you not tell me his name ? "

As she spoke, the clashing of spurs was heard upon

the staircase; some voices passed by and were lost in the distance, and the sound of a solitary step approached the door.

"That person is now here, madame," said the officer, standing on one side and assuming an attitude of submission and respect.

At the same instant the door opened and a man appeared upon the threshold. He was without hat, carried a sword at his side, and was rumpling a handkerchief between his fingers.

Her Ladyship thought that she recognized this shadow in the gloom, and supporting herself with one hand on the arm of the chair, she bent forward her head, in order, as it were, to meet a certainty.

The stranger slowly approached and as he advanced and gradually came within range of the light emitted by the lamp, Her Ladyship involuntarily recoiled. And then, when she had no longer any doubt:

"What! my brother!" she exclaimed, overwhelmed with astonishment, "is it you?"

"Yes, fair lady," replied Lord de Winter, making her a bow, half courteous and half ironical, "myself."

"But then, this castle——"

"Is mine."

"This apartment——"

"Is yours."

"Then I am your prisoner?"

"Or something very like it."

"But it is a frightful abuse of power."

"No hard words, madame; let us sit down and have some quiet talk, as is suitable between brother and sister."

Then turning toward the door and perceiving that the young officer awaited his final orders:

"It is all right," said he. "I thank you. Now leave us, Mr. Felton."

CHAPTER L.

A CHAT BETWEEN A BROTHER AND A SISTER.

During the time which Lord de Winter occupied in shutting and bolting the door and moving a seat beside the easy-chair of his sister-in-law, Her Ladyship was thoughtfully directing her glance into the depths of possibility and discovering the whole of that plot of which she could form no conception so long as she continued ignorant of the person into whose hands she had unhappily fallen. She knew her brother-in-law to be a true gentleman, fond of the chase, playing freely, and gallant with regard to women, but of powers below the average with respect to intrigues. How had he been able to know of her arrival and to have her arrested, and why did he desire to retain her?

Athos had said a few words which proved that her conversation with the cardinal had been heard by other ears; but she could not imagine that he could so promptly and so boldly have dug a countermine. She rather feared that her former proceedings in England had been discovered. Buckingham might have guessed that it was she who had cut off his diamond studs and have sought to avenge himself for that petty treachery. But Buckingham was incapable of any extremities against a woman, especially if that woman was supposed to have been actuated by a sentiment of jealousy.

This supposition appeared the most probable: she thought that they wished to revenge the past and not to anticipate the future.

However, she congratulated herself on having fallen into the hands of her brother-in-law, whom she hoped easily to manage, rather than into those of a direct enemy.

"Yes, brother, let us have a talk," she said, with a sort of sprightliness, determined as she was to draw from this conversation, in spite of all the dissimulation

which Lord de Winter might bring to it, such information as she needed to regulate her future conduct.

"You have made up your mind, then, to return to England," said Lord de Winter, "in spite of the determination you so often expressed to me in Paris never again to set your foot upon the territory of Great Britain!"

Her Ladyship replied to this question by another:

"First tell me," said she, "how you could manage to have me watched so closely as not only to know beforehand that I was coming, but also the day, the hour, and the port where I should land?"

Lord de Winter adopted the same tactics as Her Ladyship, thinking that, as his sister-in-law employed them, they were undoubtedly the best.

"But tell me yourself, my dear sister, for what purpose you are come to England?"

"Why, I have come to see you," replied the lady, ignorant how much she aggravated by this answer the suspicions which D'Artagnan's letter had excited in her brother-in-law's mind, and only wishing to captivate the blindness of her auditor by a lie.

"Oh! to see me!" said Lord de Winter, sneeringly.

"Assuredly, to see you. What is there surprising in that?"

"And you had no other motive in coming to England but to see me?"

"No."

"Then it is for my sake alone that you have given yourself the trouble to cross the channel?"

"For you alone."

"I' faith, your tenderness is excessive, my dear sister."

"But am I not your nearest relative?" demanded the lady in a tone of the most touching simplicity.

"And also my sole heiress, are you not?" said Lord de Winter in turn, fixing his eyes upon those of Her Ladyship; "that is to say, through your son."

Great as was her power of self-command Her Ladyship could not refrain from starting; and as, in uttering

these last words, Lord de Winter had laid his hand upon his sister's arm, this start had not escaped him.

In truth, the blow was both direct and deep. The first idea in the lady's mind was that Kitty had betrayed her and had disclosed to the baron that interested aversion of which she had imprudently permitted the manifestations to escape her before her maid; and she also recollected the furious and impolitic attack which she had made on D'Artagnan after he had saved her brother-in-law's life.

"I do not understand what you mean, my lord," said she, wishing to gain time and to make her adversary talk; "is there some hidden meaning in your words?"

"Oh, no," said Lord de Winter, with apparent good humor; "you wish to see me and you come to England. I am informed of this wish, or rather I suspect that you feel it, and to spare you all the inconvenience attending a nocturnal arrival in the harbor and all the fatigue of a landing, I send one of my officers to meet you. I put a carriage at your command and he brings you here to this castle, of which I am the governor, where I am every day, and where, to satisfy our mutual desire of seeing each other, I have had an apartment prepared for your reception. What is there in all this more surprising than in what you have told me?"

"No; but what surprises me is that you should have received previous intelligence of my arrival."

"And yet it is the simplest thing in the world, my dear sister. Did you not observe that on entering the Roads, the captain of your little vessel sent forward his log-book and the register of his passengers and crew that he might obtain permission to enter the port? I am the governor of the harbor; this book was brought to me and I recognized your name. My heart told me what your speech has just confirmed—that is to say your motive for thus braving the dangers of a voyage so perilous, or at any rate so fatiguing, at this season, and I sent out my cutter to escort you. You know what followed."

Her ladyship was satisfied that his lordship lied and she was only the more alarmed.

"Brother," said she, "was not that the Duke of Buckingham whom I saw on the jetty as I landed?"

"Himself," replied Lord de Winter. "Oh! I can well imagine that the sight of him would strike you. You came from a country where they must think a good deal about him, and I know that his armaments against France engage much of the attention of your friend the cardinal!"

"My friend the cardinal!" exclaimed the lady, perceiving that on this point also, as on the other, Lord de Winter seemed to be equally well informed.

"Is he not your friend, then?" carelessly inquired the baron. "Oh! pardon me; I thought he was. But we will talk of his grace hereafter. Let us not abandon the sentimental turn which the conversation had taken. You came, you say, to see me?"

"Yes,"

"Well, I have told you that your wish shall be gratified, and that we shall see each other every day."

"Must I then remain here forever?" demanded the lady, with some degree of dread.

"Do you find yourself badly lodged here, my dear sister? Ask for what you want and I will hasten to provide it."

"But I have neither my own women nor my servants with me here."

"You shall have everything you want of that kind. Only tell me what kind of establishment your first husband kept for you and, although I am but your brother-in-law, I shall arrange your present home upon a similar footing."

"My first husband!" exclaimed the lady, looking at Lord de Winter with wildness in her eyes.

"Yes, your French husband—I do not mean my own brother. But if you have forgotten it, as he is still alive, I can write to him and he will send me the necessary information on the subject."

Cold drops rolled down Her Ladyship's forehead.

"You are jesting," said she, in a hoarse voice.

"Do I look like it?" inquired the baron, rising, and retreating one step.

"Or rather, you mean to insult me," continued she, convulsively grasping the arms of her chair, and raising herself by that means.

"I insult you," said Lord de Winter, contemptuously; "and do you really think that possible, madame?"

"Sir," said Her Ladyship, "you are either drunk or mad. Leave me and send me a woman."

"Women are very indiscreet, my dear sister. Cannot I serve you as a waiting-maid? and thus all our secrets will remain in the family."

"Insolent fellow!" exclaimed Her Ladyship. Then, as if moved by a spring, she bounded toward the baron, who awaited her with calmness, yet with a hand upon the hilt of his sword.

"Ah, ah!" said he, "I know that you have a habit of assassinating people; but I will defend myself, I warn you, even against you."

"Ah! you are right," said the lady, "and you look to me like one who is coward enough to raise his hand against a woman!"

"And if that were to happen I should have an excuse. Besides, mine would not be the first man's hand that had been laid upon you, I imagine."

And the baron, by a slow, accusing gesture, pointed to the lady's left shoulder, which he almost touched with his finger.

Her Ladyship uttered a hoarse cry and retreated to the further corner of the room, like a panther drawing back before its spring.

"Oh, roar as much as you please!" exclaimed Lord de Winter, "only do not try to bite; for I warn you that would only prove the worse for you. There are no lawyers here who regulate succession beforehand, there is no knight-errant who will pick up a quarrel with me for the sake of the fair lady whom I keep imprisoned

but I have here judges who will dispose of a woman who, being already married, was shameless enough to intrude herself into the family of my elder brother, Lord de Winter; and these judges will hand you over to an executioner who will make your two shoulders alike."

The eyes of Her Ladyship shot forth such lightning glances that, although he was an armed man before an unarmed woman, he felt the chill of fear penetrating to his very soul. Nevertheless, he continued, but with increasing fury:

"Yes, I understand: after having inherited my brother's property, you would like to inherit mine also; but be assured beforehand, though you may be able to assassinate me or to have me assassinated, my precautions are already taken—not one penny of what I possess shall come either into your hands or into those of your son. Are you not already wealthy enough in the enjoyment of nearly half a million and could you not pause in your fatal course, if you do not really do wickedness from an unbounded and intense love of it? Oh, I swear to you, if my brother's memory were not still sacred to me, you should be sent to rot in some dungeon of the state or to satiate the curiosity of the mob at Tyburn! I shall, however, be silent; but you must learn to endure your confinement in tranquillity. In a fortnight or three weeks I shall set out with the army for La Rochelle; on the evening before my departure you will be sent on board a vessel, which I shall see set sail and which will convey you to one of our southern colonies; and you may rely upon it that I shall put you in charge of a companion who will blow out your brains on the first attempt that you may make to return to England or to the Continent."

Her Ladyship listened with an attention that expanded the pupils of her burning eyes.

"Yes," continued Lord de Winter, "but at present you will continue in this castle; the walls are thick, the doors are strong, the bars are solid; and besides, your

window looks directly down into the sea. My ship company, who are devoted to me in life and death, kee guard around this chamber and command every passag that conducts into the courtyard; and even there yo will find three iron-grated doors, to pass through whic the watchword is requisite; the orders are precise— step, a motion, or a word on your part which bears th semblance of an intention to escape, will draw their fi upon you. If you should be killed, English justice ough I think, to be grateful to me for having spared her son trouble. Ah! your features have assumed their calm ness and your countenance regains its confidence. 'Te days or a fortnight,' you say to yourself; 'Bah! b that time some idea will suggest itself to my inventiv mind. I have an infernal disposition, and shall fin some victim. Within a fortnight from this time I sha have escaped from here.' Try your fortune!"

Finding her thoughts thus plainly read, Her Ladyshi dug her nails into her flesh that she might deprive he face of every expression save that of agony.

Lord de Winter continued:

"As to the officer who is in command here during m absence, you have seen him; therefore you alread know him. You are aware that he can keep to h instructions, for you did not travel from Portsmout without trying to make him talk. What think you o him? Could a marble statue be more passionless o mute? You have already tried the power of you seductions over many men and unfortunately you hav always succeeded; but try them now on this man and by Jove! if you succeed, I shall believe you to be th very fiend himself."

He went toward the door and opened it suddenly.

"Call Mr. Felton," said he. "Wait a momen madame, and I shall recommend you to his care."

During the strange silence which then reigned betwee them the sound of a slow and regular step was hear approaching. In the shadow of the corridor a huma form was soon apparent and the young lieutenant wit

whom we have already been made acquainted stood at the door, awaiting the baron's orders.

"Come in, my dear John," said Lord de Winter, "come in and shut the door."

The young officer entered the room.

"Now," said the baron, "look at this woman. She is young and beautiful; she has every earthly fascination; but she is a monster, who at twenty-five years of age has committed as many crimes as you could read off in a year in the archives of our tribunals. Her voice prepossesses you in her favor; her beauty enthralls her victims; and in justice to her be it said that her body pays what she has promised. She will attempt to seduce you, perhaps to kill you. I have rescued you from misery, Felton; I have had you made lieutenant; I have once saved your life—you remember on what occasion; I am not only your protector, but your friend—not only your benefactor, but your father. This woman has come to England to plot against my life. I hold the serpent in my power. Well, I call you here and I say to you, 'My dear Felton—John, my son—defend me, and guard yourself especially from this woman. Swear that you will preserve her for the punishment she deserves! John Felton, I trust your word; John Felton, I confide in your honor.'"

"My lord," answered the young officer, exhibiting on his open face all the hatred he could find in his heart, "I swear to you that everything shall be done as you desire."

Her Ladyship received this look like a resigned victim. It was impossible to see a softer or more submissive expression than that which then reigned over her beautiful face. Scarcely could Lord de Winter himself recognize the tigress which he had the instant before almost prepared to fight.

"She must never leave this room—do you hear, John?" continued the baron; "she must have no communication with any one; she must speak to no one but yourself, if, indeed, you will do her the honor to talk to her."

"It is quite enough, my lord—I have sworn!"

"And now, madame," said the baron, "endeavor to make your peace with God, for you have been judged by men."

Her Ladyship let her head droop as if she felt actually crushed by this sentence. Lord de Winter left the room, making a sign to Felton, who followed him and closed the door.

Directly afterward was heard in the passage the heavy tread of a marine, who was keeping guard, with his axe at his belt and his musket in his hand.

Her Ladyship remained for a few minutes in the same position, for she fancied that they might be watching her through the keyhole. Then she slowly raised her head, which had resumed a formidable expression of threat and defiance; ran to the door and listened, looked out of the window, and returned to bury herself in an immense easy-chair and abandon herself to anxious thought.

CHAPTER LI.

THE OFFICER.

In the meantime the cardinal was expecting news from England; but as no news arrived, excepting such as was vexatious and alarming, La Rochelle was formally invested. However certain success appeared—thanks to the precautions which had been taken, and more especially to the causeway, which no longer permitted any vessel to approach the besieged town—the blockade might yet continue a long time; and it was a great affront to the arms of the king and a great annoyance to the cardinal, who had no longer, it is true, to embroil Louis XIII. with Anne of Austria, for that had been accomplished, but to reconcile M. de Bassompierre, who had quarreled with the Duke of Angoulême.

As to Monsieur, who had begun the siege, he left the task of finishing it to the cardinal.

The town, in spite of the incredible persistence of its mayor, had attempted a sort of mutiny to surrender. But the mayor had sent the mutineers to be hung. This execution subdued the most unruly, who were thereby determined to submit, in preference to death from starvation, as the latter mode of dying appeared to them less certain and more slow than that by strangulation.

The besiegers on their side occasionally captured some of the messengers whom the Rochellais dispatched to Buckingham, or the spies whom Buckingham had sent to the Rochellais. In both cases the captives were subjected to a summary process. The cardinal pronounced the single word, "Hang!" His majesty was invited to the execution. The king came languidly and chose a good place for observing all the details of the operation. This amused him for a time and gave him a little patience with the siege; but it did not prevent him from becoming heartily weary or from talking incessantly of returning to Paris; so that, if the messengers or spies had fallen short, his eminence, in spite of all his fertility of imagination, would have found himself in very considerable embarrassment.

Nevertheless the time passed away and still the Rochellais did not surrender. The last spy who had been taken was the bearer of a letter which informed Buckingham that the town was at the last extremity; but instead of adding: "If your assistance should not arrive before a fortnight we must surrender," it merely said: "If your assistance should not arrive before a fortnight we shall all be dead from hunger when it comes."

The Rochellais, therefore, had no hope but in Buckingham—Buckingham was their Messiah. It was manifest that if they should receive indubitable information that no further dependence was to be placed on Buckingham, their courage would forsake them with their hopes.

The cardinal, on this account, waited with extreme impatience for intelligence from England which might announce to him that Buckingham would not arrive.

The question of taking the town by assault, which had been often debated in the king's council, had been always dismissed. In the first instance, La Rochelle appeared to be impregnable; and then the cardinal, whatever he might himself have said about it, was well aware that the horror of the blood which would have been shed in such an encounter, where Frenchmen fought against Frenchmen, would have been a retrogradation of sixty years imprinted on his policy; and the cardinal was at that epoch what we now call a man of progress. In fact, the sack of La Rochelle and the slaughter of three or four thousand Huguenots who would have perished would have had, in 1628, too great a resemblance to the massacre of St. Bartholomew, in 1572. Finally, in addition to all this, this extreme measure, to which his majesty, like a good Catholic, had no repugnance, always broke down before this argument of the besieging generals: "La Rochelle is impregnable except by famine."

The cardinal was unable to dismiss from his own mind the fear which he entertained of his terrible emissary; for he had also understood the strange characteristics of that woman who was at the same time half lioness and half serpent. Had she betrayed him, or was she dead? He knew her well enough, in any case, to be assured that, whether she was acting for him or against him, whether enemy or friend, she could not remain inactive without very powerful obstructions. But whence could these obstructions arise? This was what he was unable to divine.

After all, however, he had with good reason much confidence in Her Ladyship. He had suspected in her past career circumstances so terrible that his own red mantle was required to conceal them; and he felt that from some cause or other this woman was his own because from him alone she could obtain support more potent than the danger which pursued her.

The cardinal resolved, therefore, to carry on the war alone and to expect foreign aid only as one may expect the coincidence of a fortunate chance. He continued

the construction of that famous causeway which was to carry famine into La Rochelle, and in the meantime he cast his eyes over that unhappy city, which contained so much profound misery and so many heroic virtues, recalling to his mind the expression of Louis XI., who had been his own political predecessor, as he was the predecessor of Robespierre, and adopting this maxim of the companion of Tristan: "Divide to govern."

When Henry IV. besieged Paris he had thrown over the walls bread and other edibles. The cardinal threw over brief addresses, in which he presented to the Rochellais how unjust and self-willed and barbarous had been the conduct of their chiefs, who possessed abundance of wheat, yet did not distribute it; and who adopted as a maxim—for they also had their maxims—that the death of women, of old men and of children was a thing of little moment, so that the men who were to defend the walls continued vigorous and well. Until then, either from devotedness or from inability to contend against it, this maxim had, without being generally adopted, passed from theory into practice; but these addresses successfully assailed it. They reminded the men that these women, children and old men, who were allowed to die of hunger, were their wives, their offspring and their sires; and that it would be more just if all were alike subjected to the common wretchedness, so that a similarity of position might give occasion for unanimity of resolution.

These addresses produced all the effect expected by him who had written them, in determining a great number of inhabitants to open secret negotiations with the royal army

But at the very moment when his eminence saw his measure beginning to bear fruit and was congratulating himself on having adopted it, an inhabitant of Rochelle who had arrived from Portsmouth managed to pass through the royal lines, God knows how—so complete was the triple watchfulness of Bassompierre, of Schomberg and the Duke of Angoulême, themselves overlooked

by the cardinal—and announced that he had seen splendid fleet ready to set sail before another wee Buckingham, moreover, declared to the mayor that th great league against France was at last about to l proclaimed and that the kingdom would be speedil invaded at the same time by the armies of Englan Spain, and the Empire. This letter was publicly read all parts of the town, copies of it were posted at th corners of the streets, and those, even, who had attempte to commence negotiations, interrupted them, being r solved to wait for the succor which was so soon to reac them.

This unexpected circumstance renewed all the origin anxieties of Richelieu and compelled him to turn h eyes once more across the sea.

During all this time the royal army, free from th cares weighing upon its only true commander, led most joyous life, for provisions were not scarce in th camp nor money either. The regiments were all rivalry in gayety and audacity. To take spies and han them, to undertake daring expeditions on the causewa or the sea, to imagine follies and to execute them calm —such were the pastimes which made those days see short to the army, which were so long, not only for th Rochellais, who were worried by famine and anxietie but for the cardinal, who blockaded them so vigorously

Sometimes when the cardinal, who was always ridin about like the humblest soldier of the army, directe his thoughtful eyes over the works which advanced slowly in comparison to his desire, although constructe by engineers whom he had collected from the remote corners of France, if he met with a musketeer of M. Treville's company he approached him and looked him in a singular way; and then, not recognizing hi as one of our four companions, he transferred to oth objects his penetrating glance and his capacious thought

One day, when consumed by a mortal lassitude mind, without hopes of treating with the Rochellais ar without intelligence from England, the cardinal wei

forth with no other aim but that of going out, and only accompanied by Cahusac and La Houdiniere, wandering along the sands and mingling the immensity of his own dreams with the immensity of the ocean, he came at a gentle pace to a small hill, from the top of which he perceived behind a hedge, reclining on the grass and protected from the sun by a group of trees, seven men, surrounded by empty bottles. Four of these men were our musketeers, getting ready to listen to the reading of a letter which one of them had just received. This letter was so important that it had made them forsake some cards and dice which they had left upon a drum.

The three others were the valets of the gentlemen and were at that moment engaged in opening an enormous demijohn of Collioure wine.

The cardinal, as we have said, was in a gloomy mood, and when he was in this state of mind nothing so much increased his sullenness as the gayety of others.

He had, besides, a singular habit of always supposing that the circumstances which caused his sadness were those which excited the gayety of strangers. Making a sign to Cahusac and La Houdiniere to halt, he got off his horse and approached these suspicious laughers, hoping that by the aid of the sand which deadened the sound of his steps, and the hedge which concealed his person, he might hear some words of a conversation which appeared so interesting. At ten paces from the hedge he recognized the Gascon dialect of D'Artagnan, and as he had already seen that the men were musketeers, he did not doubt that the three others were those who were called the inseparables—that is to say, Athos, Porthos, and Aramis.

It may be imagined that this discovery increased his desire to hear the conversation. His eyes assumed a strange expression and with the stealthy pace of a tiger- at he approached the hedge, but he had only been able o catch a few vague syllables having no definite meaning, when a sonorous and short exclamation made him tart and attracted the attention of the musketeers.

"Officer!" called out Grimaud.

"You are speaking, I think, rascal," said Athos raising himself on one elbow and fascinating Grimaud with his sparkling eye.

Grimaud, therefore, did not add one word, contenting himself with pointing with his finger toward the hedge and indicating by this gesture the cardinal and his escort.

With one bound the four musketeers were on their feet and bowed respectfully.

The cardinal appeared furious.

"It seems that the gentlemen of the musketeers have themselves guarded," said he. "Is it because the English come by land or do the musketeers consider themselves as superior officers?"

"My lord," replied Athos—for in the midst of the general confusion he alone had preserved that coolness and calmness of the nobleman which had never failed him—"my lord, the musketeers, when their duty is ended or when they are not on duty, play and drink and are very superior officers to their own servants."

"Their servants!" growled the cardinal; "servants who have a watchword to warn you when any one approaches. They are not servants—they are sentinels."

"Your eminence may, however, perceive, that had we not taken this precaution we should have run the hazard of permitting you to pass without paying our respects and without offering our thanks to you for uniting D'Artagnan and us," continued Athos. "You, D'Artagnan, who were but now wishing for an opportunity of expressing your gratitude to his eminence, here is one given to you—take advantage of it."

These words were uttered with that imperturbable coolness which distinguished Athos in times of danger and with that excessive courtesy which made him on certain occasions a king more dignified than kings by birth.

D'Artagnan came forward and stammered out some

words of thanks, which quickly died away before the severe looks of the cardinal.

"It does not signify, gentlemen," continued the cardinal, without appearing in the slightest degree turned from his first intention by the incident which Athos had suggested, "it does not signify. I do not like to see simple soldiers, because they have the advantage of serving in a privileged regiment, playing the great men. Discipline is the same for all."

Athos allowed the cardinal to finish this sentence and, bowing assent, thus replied:

"Discipline, my lord, has been, I hope, in no degree forgotten by us. We are not on duty, and we believe that, not being on duty, we might dispose of our time precisely as we pleased. If it should fortunately happen that your eminence has some special orders to give us, we are ready to obey them. Your lordship perceives," continued Athos, frowning, for this species of interrogatory began to irritate him, "that, to be ready at the least alarm, we have brought with us all our arms."

He pointed with his finger to the four muskets piled together near the drum which bore the cards and dice.

"Your eminence may believe," added D'Artagnan, "that we should have come to meet you if we could have supposed that it was you who approached us with so small a retinue."

The cardinal bit his mustaches and even his lips.

"Do you know what you look like—always together as you now are, armed as you are and guarded by your valets?" said the cardinal. "You look like four conspirators."

"Oh! as for that, my lord," said Athos, "it is true; and we do conspire, as your eminence might have seen the other morning—only it is against the Rochellais."

"Ah! gentlemen politicians," replied the cardinal, frowning in his turn, "the secret of many things might be found in your brains if one could read in them, as you were reading in that letter which you concealed the moment that you saw me coming."

The color flew into the face of Athos and he made one step toward his eminence.

"It might be thought that you really do suspect us, my lord, and that we are undergoing a real examination. If that be the case, would your eminence deign to explain himself, and we should at least know what we are to expect?"

"And if it was an examination," replied the cardinal, "others besides you have been subjected to it, M. Athos, and have answered."

"And therefore, my lord, have I said, that your eminence has only to question and that we are ready to reply."

"What letter was that you were reading, M. Aramis, and which you concealed?"

"A letter from a woman, my lord."

"Oh, I understand," said the cardinal; "discretion is necessary as to epistles of that kind; but nevertheless they may be shown to a confessor and you know I am in orders."

"My lord," said Athos, with a calmness all the more fearful that he was staking his head on his answer: "my lord, the letter is from a woman, but it is not signed either by Marion Delorme, or Madame de Courbalet, or by Madame de Chaulnes."

The cardinal became as pale as death. A savage flash shot from his eyes. He turned round as if to give an order to Cahusac and La Houdiniere.

Athos saw the movement and took a step toward the muskets, on which the eyes of his three friends were fixed, like men who were not inclined to allow themselves to be arrested. The cardinal was himself only the third man of his party. The musketeers, including their valets, were seven. He judged also that the game would be still more unequal, if Athos and his friends should really conspire; and, by one of those rapid changes which he always had at command, all his anger melted into a smile.

"Come, come," said he, "you are brave young men,

proud in the sunshine, but faithful in the dark; and there is no great harm in keeping a good watch over yourselves, when you watch so well over others. Gentlemen, I have not forgotten the night when you served as my escort in going to the Red Dove-cote. If there were any danger to be feared on the road I am about to take, I would beg you to accompany me; but as there is none, remain where you are and finish your wine, your game, and your letter. Adieu, gentlemen."

And again mounting his horse, which Cahusac had brought him, he saluted them with his hand and went his way.

The four young men, erect and motionless, followed him with their eyes, but without uttering a word until he was out of sight. Then they looked at one another.

The countenances of all of them indicated consternation; for, in spite of the amicable adieu of his eminence, they well knew that the cardinal had gone away with rage in his heart.

Athos alone smiled a haughty and disdainful smile.

When the cardinal was out of reach of sound as well as sight:

"That Grimaud called out very late," said Porthos, who had a great desire to vent his ill-humor on some one.

Grimaud was about to answer by excusing himself when Athos raised his finger and Grimaud remained silent.

"Would you have given up the letter, Aramis?" said D'Artagnan.

"I had decided," said Aramis, in the softest, most melodious voice, "if he had persisted in requiring the letter, that I would have presented it to him with one hand, and passed my sword through his body with the other."

"I expected as much," said Athos, "and for that reason I threw myself between you. Verily, that man is extremely imprudent to talk in such style to other men. One would imagine that he had never been engaged with any but women and children."

"My dear Athos," said D'Artagnan, "I admire you; but yet we were wrong, after all."

"How wrong?" said Athos. "Whose, then, is this air we breathe? Whose is this ocean, over which our looks extend? Whose is this sand, on which we are resting? Whose is this letter from your mistress? Do all these belong to the cardinal? Upon my honor, this man fancies that the world belongs to him. There were you, stammering, stupefied and overwhelmed, as though the Bastile stared you in the face and the gigantic Medusa had transformed you into stone. Is it a conspiracy, I wonder, to be in love? You are in love with a woman whom the cardinal has chosen to confine; you wish to rescue her from his hands; it is a game which you are playing against his eminence. This letter is your hand. Why should you show your hand to your adversary? If he can guess it, very good. We shall easily guess his, you may be assured."

"In fact, Athos, what you now say is full of sense," replied D'Artagnan.

"In that case, let us not say another word about what has just occurred and let Aramis resume his cousin's letter where the cardinal interrupted him."

Aramis drew the letter from his pocket; the three friends drew near him, and the three valets again grouped themselves around the capacious demijohn.

"You had only read one or two lines," said D'Artagnan; "begin it over again at the very beginning."

"Willingly," replied Aramis.

"My Dear Cousin,—I really believe that I shall decide on going to Stenay, where my sister has made our little servant enter into a convent of the Carmelites. That poor child is quite resigned; she knows that she cannot live anywhere else without endangering her salvation. Nevertheless, if our family affairs should be settled as we wish, I think that she will run the danger of perdition and will return to those whom she regrets; more particularly as she knows that they are always thinking

of her. In the meantime she is not very unhappy; all that she now desires is a letter from her intended. I know very well that these sort of articles have some difficulty in passing through the gratings; but after all, as I have proved to you, my dear cousin, I am not very unskillful, and I will undertake the commission. My sister thanks you for your good and enduring remembrance; she was for a short time in great anxiety, but she is at present more composed, having sent her agent down there, that nothing unexpected may happen.

"Adieu, my dear cousin. Let me hear from you as often as you can; that is to say, as often as you can do so safely. I embrace you. MARIE MICHON."

"Oh, what do I owe you, Aramis!" exclaimed D'Artagnan. "Dear Constance; I have at last some news of her. She lives—she is in safety in a convent—she is at Stenay! And where is Stenay, Athos?"

"On the frontiers of Alsace, in Lorraine; when once the siege is raised, we may take a turn there."

"And it will not be long, I hope," said Porthos, "for this morning they hung another spy, who declared that the Rochellais were now reduced to feed upon the leather of their shoes. Supposing that after having eaten the leather they should consume the sole, I do not exactly see what can remain for them afterward, unless they should take to eating one another."

"Poor fools!" said Athos, emptying a glass of excellent Bordeaux, which, without possessing at that time the reputation that it now enjoys, did not the less deserve it, "poor fools! as if the Catholic faith were not the most profitable and the most agreeable of all religions. Yet never mind," added he, smacking his tongue against his palate, "they are brave fellows. But what the plague are you doing, Aramis?" continued Athos; "are you putting that letter into your pocket?"

"True," said D'Artagnan, "Athos is right; it must be burned. And who knows even then but that the cardinal may have some secret for reading ashes?"

"He ought to have one," said Athos.

"But what will you do with the letter?" inquired Porthos.

"Come here, Grimaud," said Athos. "To punish you for having spoken without leave, my friend, you must eat this piece of paper; then, to reward you for the service which you will have rendered us, you shall afterwards drink this glass of wine. Here is the letter first—chew it with energy."

Grimaud smiled, and with his eyes fixed on the glass, which Athos filled to the very brim, he chewed away at the paper and finally swallowed it.

"Bravo, Master Grimaud!" said Athos; "and now take this. Good! I will dispense with your saying thank you."

Grimaud silently swallowed the glass of Bordeaux, and during the whole time that this pleasing operation lasted, his eyes, which were fixed upon the heavens, spoke a language which, though mute, was not, therefore, the less expressive.

"And now," said Athos, "unless the cardinal should form the ingenious idea of opening Grimaud's stomach, I believe that we may be pretty easy."

During this time his eminence pursued his melancholy way, murmuring under his mustaches:

"Decidedly, these four men must belong to me!"

CHAPTER LII.

THE FIRST DAY OF IMPRISONMENT.

LET us now return to Milady, of whom a glance given to the coast of France has made us lose sight for an instant.

We shall again find her in the same desperate position in which we left her: digging for herself an abyss of dark reflections--a gloomy hell—at the gate of which

she had almost left hope behind her; for the first time she doubts, and for the first time she fears.

Twice has her fortune failed her; twice has she seen herself betrayed; and on both these occasions it was against that fatal talent, sent no doubt by Providence on purpose to oppose her, that she had been wrecked. D'Artagnan had conquered her—the invincible one in evil until then.

He had abused her in her love, humiliated her in her pride, thwarted her in her ambition, and now he was ruining her in her fortune, depriving her of her liberty, and menacing even her life. But, more than all, he had raised up a corner of her mask—of that ægis which had covered her and rendered her so strong.

D'Artagnan had turned aside from Buckingham, whom she hated—as she did everything that she had once loved—the tempest with which Richelieu had threatened him in the person of the queen. D'Artagnan had personated De Wardes, for whom she had felt the caprice of a tigress, irresistible as the caprices of women of that character ever are. D'Artagnan had discovered that terrible secret which she had sworn that none should know and not die. And lastly, at the very moment when she had obtained from Richelieu an instrument, by means of which she hoped to avenge herself on her enemy, that instrument is snatched from her hands, and it is D'Artagnan who holds her a prisoner and who is going to transport her to some loathsome Botany Bay, some infamous Tyburn of the Indian Ocean.

For all this comes unquestionably from D'Artagnan. From whom, except him, could so many disgraces be accumulated on her head? He alone could have transmitted to Lord de Winter all these frightful secrets which he had himself discovered one after another by a kind of fatality. He knew her brother-in-law and must have written to him.

How much of hatred she distils! There, motionless, with fixed and ardent eyes, seated in her solitary chamber, how well do the outbreaks of those stifled roarings

which escape at times from the excesses of her hear accord with the sound of the breakers, which rise, bellow moan, and dash like some eternal, impotent despai against the rocks on which that dark and haughty edific is built! How, by the light of those flashes which he furious anger casts across her mind, does she conceiv against Madame Bonancieux, against Buckingham, bu most of all against D'Artagnan, projects of magnificer revenge, lost in the distant future!

Yes, but to avenge herself she must be free, and fo the prisoner to get free there is a wall to pierce, bars t loosen, boards to break through; and these are enter prises which the patience and strength of man ma accomplish, but before which the feverish irritation o a woman must infallibly be exercised in vain. Beside for all these labors time is needed—months, or perhap years—and she has ten or twelve days, according t the declaration of Lord de Winter, her fraternal, ye most fearful jailer.

And yet, if she were a man she would attempt a this and might perchance succeed. Why, then, ha Heaven committed the mistake of enshrining so stron a soul within a form so frail and delicate?

Thus were the first moments of her captivity terrible convulsions of rage, which she was impotent to restrain paid to nature the tribute of her feminine weakness But by degrees she overcame these ebullitions o frenzied anger, the nervous trembling which had ag tated her frame subsided, and she at length fell bac upon her own strength, like a tired serpent taking it repose.

"Come, come, I was a fool to be so violent," said she as she looked at the reflection of her burning glance i the glass in which she seemed to question herself. "N violence! Violence is a proof of weakness. Besides, have never succeeded by that means. Perhaps, if used my strength against women I might chance to fin them more feeble than myself, and consequently migh vanquish them; but it is against men that I struggle

and I am only a woman to them. Let me struggle like a woman. My strength is in my weakness."

Then, as if to satisfy herself of the change to which she could submit her most flexible and expressive features, she made them successively assume all expressions, from that of anger, which contracted every muscle, to that of the softest, most affectionate and most seductive smile. Then, under her artistic hands, her hair was made to adopt every undulation which might add to the varied attractions of her charming face. At last, in self-complacency, she murmured:

"Well, there is nothing lost. I am still beautiful."

It was nearly eight o'clock in the evening. Her Ladyship perceived a bed and she thought that a few hours of repose would not only refresh her head, but her complexion also. Yet before she lay down a still better idea suggested itself. She had heard something said about supper. She had already been above an hour in the room; they could not tarry long before they brought her meal. The prisoner did not wish to lose any time, and resolved even this very evening to make some attempt to feel her way by studying the characters of those to whom her guardianship had been confided.

A light appeared beneath the door and this announced the return of her jailers. Her Ladyship, who had risen up, threw herself hastily into the chair, with her head thrown back, her beautiful hair loose and disheveled, her breast half naked under the rumpled lace, one hand on her heart and the other hanging down.

The bolts were drawn, the door grated on its hinges, steps were heard in the chamber, and approached her.

"Place the table there," said a voice which the prisoner recognized as that of Felton.

The order was obeyed.

"You will bring lights and relieve the guard," continued Felton; and this double order, which the young lieutenant gave to the same individuals, proved to the lady that her attendants and her guards were the same men—that is to say, soldiers.

The commands of Felton were executed with a silent rapidity which gave a good idea of the flourishing condition of the discipline that he maintained.

At last Felton, who had not yet looked at Her Ladyship, turned toward her.

"Ah! ah!" said he, "she sleeps; very well, when she awakes she will sup." And he took a few steps toward the door.

"But, lieutenant," said a soldier, who was less stoical than his officer and who had approached Her Ladyship, "that woman is not asleep."

"What! not asleep!" said Felton. "What is she about, then?"

"She has fainted. Her face is very pale and I can scarcely hear her breathing."

"You are right," said Felton, after he had looked at Her Ladyship from the place where he stood, without taking a single step toward her; "go and tell Lord de Winter that his prisoner has fainted, for I do not know what to do, the circumstance not having been foreseen."

The soldier left the room to execute his officer's commands. Felton seated himself in a chair which happened to be near the door, and waited, without uttering a word or making the least movement. Her Ladyship was mistress of that great art, so studied by women, of seeing everything through her long eyelashes without seeming to open her eyes; and she perceived Felton, who had turned his back toward her. She continued watching him for about ten minutes, and during these ten minutes he did not once look round.

It then occurred to her that Lord de Winter would soon arrive and by his presence give new power to her jailer. Her first experiment had failed, and she bore it like a woman who had confidence in her own resources. She therefore raised her head, opened her eyes and sighed feebly.

At this sigh Felton at length turned around.

"Ah! you are awake at last, madame," said he, "so

I have nothing more to do here. If you require anything you will call."

"Oh, my God! my God! what have I suffered!" murmured Her Ladyship in that harmonious voice, which, like that of the enchantress of old, fascinated all whom she desired to destroy.

She raised herself in her chair and assumed an attitude more graceful and alluring than that which she had borne during the time she was reclining.

Felton arose.

"You will be waited upon in this way, madame, three times a day," said he, "in the morning at nine o'clock, at one o'clock in the afternoon, and at eight in the evening. If this should not be agreeable to you, you can appoint other hours instead of those which I propose, and on this point your wishes shall be attended to. A woman from the neighborhood has received instructions to attend upon you; she will henceforth reside in the castle and will come whenever you require her presence."

"I thank you, sir," replied the prisoner, humbly.

Felton bowed slightly and went toward the door. Just as he was about to step over the threshold Lord de Winter appeared in the corridor, followed by the soldier who had been sent to inform him that Her Ladyship had fainted. He held in his hand a bottle of salts.

"Well, what is the matter here?" said he, in a jeering tone, when he saw the lady standing and Felton just about to leave the room. "Is this dead person alive again? By Jove! Felton, my boy, did you not see that she took you for a novice and gave you the first act of a comedy, of which we shall doubtless have the pleasure to see all the continuation?"

"I thought so, my lord," said Felton. "But after all, as the prisoner is a woman, I wished to have that consideration for her which is due from every well-bred man to a woman, if not for her sake, at least for his own."

Her Ladyship shuddered throughout her frame. These words of Felton penetrated like ice through all her veins

"So," continued Lord de Winter, still laughing, "these beautiful locks, so skillfully displayed, that delicate complexion and that languishing look have not yet seduced your stony heart?"

"No, my lord," replied the insensible young man; "and believe me, it requires more than the petty stratagems and affectations of a woman to corrupt me."

"As that is the case, my brave lieutenant, let us leave the lady to find something new and let us go to supper. Oh, you may be quite easy; she has a very fertile imagination, and the second act of this comedy will soon follow the first."

As he uttered these words Lord de Winter took Felton by the arm and led him away, laughing.

"Oh! I will surely find what will be enough!" muttered Her Ladyship, between her teeth. "Make yourself easy, poor spoiled monk, poor mortified soldier, whose uniform has been cut out of a churchman's habit!"

"Apropos, milady," said Lord de Winter, stopping on the threshold of the door, "do not allow this failure to disturb your appetite. Taste this fowl, that fish, which, on my honor, I have not had poisoned. I am on good terms with my cook and, as he does not expect to be my heir, I have entire confidence in him. Do as I do. Farewell, my dear sister, till your next fainting fit."

This was all that Her Ladyship could endure. Her hands grasped the arms of her chair convulsively, she ground her teeth heavily, her eyes followed the movement of the door as it closed behind Lord de Winter and Felton; and then, as soon as she found herself alone, a new paroxysm of despair invaded her; her glance wandered to the table, she saw a knife that glimmered on it, and rushing forward she snatched it up; how fearful was her disappointment when she found that the edge was rounded and the blade of flexible silver.

A shout of laughter resounded from behind the half closed door, which was again opened.

"Ah, ah!" exclaimed Lord de Winter, "do you see, Felton? It is exactly as I told you. That knife was intended for you, my boy—she would have killed you. It is one of her vices, thus to get rid in one way or another of those who annoy her. If I had listened to you the knife would have been of steel and pointed, and then—farewell, Felton. She would have cut your throat first and all our throats afterward. Just look, John, how well she holds her knife!"

Her Ladyship, in fact, still held the inoffensive weapon in her convulsive grasp; but these last words, this crowning insult, unnerved her hands, her strength and even her will, and the knife fell upon the ground.

"You are quite right, my lord," said Felton, in a tone of deep disgust, which penetrated to the very recesses of Her Ladyship's heart. "You are right and I was in the wrong."

And they both once more left the room.

But on this occasion the lady lent a more attentive ear than before, and she heard their steps becoming more distant, until the sound was lost in the depths of the corridors.

"I am undone!" she muttered. "I am in the power of people over whom I shall have no greater influence than over statues of bronze or granite. They know me thoroughly and wear breastplates proof against my arms. And yet," she continued a moment after, "it is impossible that everything should terminate as they have willed it."

In fact, at this last remark and this instinctive return to hope indicated, fear and all feeble sentiments could not predominate in that deep thinking soul. Her Ladyship seated herself at a table, ate of various viands, drank a small quantity of Spanish wine, and felt that all her resolution was restored.

Before she retired to rest she had already studied, analyzed, commented on, and examined in every possible way the words, the steps, the gestures, signs, and even the silence of her jailers; and from this learned

and profound and skillful examination it resulted that Felton was, upon the whole, the least invulnerable of the two.

One word especially occurred to the prisoner's mind.

"If I had listened to you," said Lord de Winter to Felton.

Felton, then, had spoken in her favor, since Lord de Winter had refused to listen to him. "Weak or strong," reasoned Her Ladyship, "this man has a ray of pity in his soul, and of this ray I will make a flame that shall consume him. As to the other one, he knows me, he fears me, and knows what he has to expect from me should I ever escape from his hands; it is, therefore, perfectly useless to attempt anything in reference to him. But with Felton it is different. He appears to be a simple, pure and virtuous young man. There are means of winning him."

Her Ladyship lay down and slept with a smile upon her lips. Any one who had seen her sleeping would have taken her for a young girl, dreaming of the garland of flowers which she was to braid around her forehead at the approaching ball.

CHAPTER LIII.

THE SECOND DAY OF IMPRISONMENT.

Her Ladyship was dreaming that she had at last defeated D'Artagnan and was looking on the spectacle of his death; and it was the sight of his abominated blood, flowing beneath the executioner's axe, which called forth the charming smile that hovered on her lips.

She slept like a prisoner lulled by a dawning hope.

On the next morning when they entered the room she was still in bed. Felton remained in the corridor. He had brought with him the woman of whom he had spoken on the previous evening and who had just arrived.

This woman entered and approached Her Ladyship's bed, offering her services.

Her Ladyship was habitually pale, her complexion would therefore easily deceive any one who saw her for the first time.

"I am feverish," she said; "I have not slept a moment throughout the tedious night. I am in dreadful suffering; will you be more humane than they were yesterday evening? All I ask is to be permitted to remain in bed."

"Would you like a physician to be sent for?" asked the woman.

Felton listened to this dialogue without uttering a word.

Her Ladyship reflected that, the more numerous the persons who surrounded her, that many more would she have to influence, and the more severe would be the vigilance of Lord de Winter. Besides, the physician might declare that the malady was feigned, and Her Ladyship, having lost the first throw, did not design to lose the second.

"A physician?" said she, "and for what purpose? Those gentlemen declared yesterday that my illness was all a comedy. It will undoubtedly be the same to-day, for since last night there has been abundant time to prejudice the doctor."

"Then," said Felton, in a tone of impatience, "say yourself, madame, what you desire to have done."

"Oh, my God! can I tell? I feel my sufferings and that is all. Give me what you please, it is of little consequence to me."

"Go for Lord de Winter," said Felton, wearied by these repeated complaints.

"Oh, no, no!" exclaimed the lady; "no, sir, do not send for him, I beseech you! I am very well—I do not want anything—do not send for him!"

She uttered this exclamation with a vehemence so natural that Felton was attracted for a few steps into the chamber.

"He is touched," thought Her Ladyship.

"And yet, madame," said Felton, "if you are *really* suffering we must send for a physician. If you are deceiving us, so much the worse for yourself, but, at all events, we shall have nothing to reproach ourselves with."

Her Ladyship made no reply; but turning her beautiful head on the pillow, she burst into a paroxysm of tears and sobs.

Felton looked at her for a moment with his ordinary insensibility, but seeing that the crisis threatened to continue, he left the room.

The woman followed him, and Lord de Winter did not make his appearance.

"I think I begin to see my way," muttered the lady, with savage delight, as she buried herself under the bedclothes to hide from those who might be watching her this burst of heartfelt satisfaction.

Two hours passed away.

"It is now time for my malady to end," thought she. "Let me get up and gain some benefit to-day. I have but ten days, and this evening two of them will have already passed away."

When the servants entered the lady's chamber in the morning her breakfast was brought to her. She concluded that they would soon return to take it away and that she would then see Felton again.

Her Ladyship was not deceived. Felton reappeared and, without noticing whether the lady had touched anything or not, he ordered the attendants to remove the table, which was generally brought in with nothing prepared upon it.

Felton, holding a book in his hand, saw another person leave the room.

Reclining in an easy-chair near the fireplace, beautiful, pale and resigned, Her Ladyship looked like a holy virgin expecting martyrdom.

Felton approached her and said:

"Lord de Winter, who, like yourself, may be a

Catholic, has imagined that it might be painful to you to be deprived of the rites and ceremonies of your religion; he therefore permits you to read the daily office of your mass, and here is a book which contains the ritual."

Observing the manner with which Felton laid the book on the little table near Her Ladyship, the tone in which he pronounced the words, *your mass*, and the contemptuous smile with which he accompanied them, Her Ladyship raised her head, and looked more attentively at the officer.

Then—by that precise manner of wearing the hair, by that dress of exaggerated simplicity, by that forehead, as polished as marble, but equally hard and impenetrable—she recognized one of those gloomy Puritans whom she had so often met with both at the court of King James and at that of the king of France, where, in spite of the recollections of St. Bartholomew, they sometimes came to seek a refuge.

She then experienced one of those sudden inspirations which are reserved for genius alone, on those great emergencies, those momentous crises, which decide their fortunes or their lives.

Those two words, *your mass*, and a single glance at Felton had, in fact, revealed to her all the importance of the answer she was about to make.

But with that rapidity of intelligence which was peculiar to her, that answer presented itself, as if ready formed upon her lips.

"I?" said she, in an accent of contempt, equal to that which she had observed in the voice of the young officer, "do you say *my mass?* Lord de Winter, the corrupted Catholic, well knows that I am not of his religion, and it is a snare which he wishes to spread for me."

"And of what religion are you then, madame?" demanded Felton, with an astonishment which, in spite of his self-command, he could not perfectly conceal.

"I will tell it," exclaimed the lady, with feigned enthusiasm, "when I shall have suffered sufficiently for my faith."

The looks of Felton discovered to Her Ladyship all the extent of the power which she had opened to herself by this single expression. And yet the young officer remained mute and motionless. His countenance alone had spoken.

"I am in the hands of my enemies," continued she, in the enthusiastic tone which she knew was popular amongst the Puritans. "Well, either may my God save me or may I perish for my God! That is the answer which I beg you to convey to Lord de Winter; and as to this book," continued she, pointing to the ritual with the tip of her finger but without touching it, as though she would have been contaminated by the touch, "you may carry it away and make use of it yourself; for you are, undoubtedly, doubly the accomplice of Lord de Winter—an accomplice in his persecution and an accomplice in his heresy."

Felton made no reply, but he took the book with the same repugnance that he had before manifested, and in a pensive mood withdrew.

Lord de Winter came at about five in the evening. During the day Her Ladyship had found time to trace the plan of her proceedings, and she received him like a woman who had already recovered all her advantages.

"It appears," said the baron, seating himself on a chair opposite the lady and stretching his feet carelessly toward the hearth, "it appears that we have made a slight apostasy."

"What do you mean, sir?"

"I mean that since the last time we saw each other we have changed our religion. Have you by chance married a third husband—a Protestant?"

"Explain yourself, my lord," replied the prisoner with great dignity; "for I hear your words but I do not understand them."

"Then the truth must be that you have no religion at all. Well, I like that the better," said Lord de Winter, with a sneer.

"It is certainly more in unison with your own principles," coldly replied the lady.

"Oh, I confess to you that it is quite a matter of indifference to me."

"You cannot avow a religious indifference, my lord, but what your debaucheries and crimes sufficiently confirm."

"What! and do you talk of debauchery, Madame Messalina? Do you talk of crimes, Lady Macbeth? Either I have misunderstood you, or you are, by God, exceedingly impudent, Sir."

"You speak thus, my lord, because we are overheard," coldly replied Her Ladyship, "and you wish to prejudice your jailers and your executioners against me."

"My jailers! my executioners! Why, madame, you speak poetically, and yesterday's comedy is turned to-night to tragedy. But after all, in eight days you will be where you ought to be and my task will be accomplished."

"Infamous task! impious task!" replied the lady, with the feigned enthusiasm of the victim who provokes her judge.

"I verily believe, upon my honor," said Lord de Winter, rising, "that this singular creature is going mad. Come, come, calm yourself, Madame Puritan, or I will put you into a dungeon. By Jove, it is my Spanish wine that has just got into your head, is it not? But be quiet; this intoxication is not dangerous and will have no bad consequence."

And Lord de Winter left the room swearing, which was at that time a perfectly gentlemanly habit.

Felton was, in fact, behind the door, and had not lost one syllable of the conversation.

Her Ladyship had judged correctly.

"Yes, go, go!" said she to her brother. "The consequences are, on the contrary, fast approaching. But you, fool that you are, will not know them until it is too late to evade them."

Silence again prevailed, and two more hours elapsed.

Supper was brought in and Her Ladyship was found engaged in prayers—prayers which she had learned from an austere Puritan, an old servant of her second husband. She appeared to be in a sort of ecstasy and not even to observe what was passing around her.

Felton made a sign that she was not to be disturbed and when everything was arranged he softly left the room with the soldiers.

The lady knew that she might be watched and therefore she continued at her prayers until the end. She fancied that the sentinel at her door did not maintain his usual step, but seemed to listen to her.

For the present she desired nothing more. She arose, seated herself at the table, ate a little, and only drank some water.

In an hour afterward the table was removed, but Her Ladyship remarked that on this occasion Felton did not accompany the soldiers.

He was afraid, then, of seeing her too often.

She turned aside to smile, for there was so much of triumph in that smile that it alone would have betrayed her.

She allowed a half-hour to elapse, and as everything was then entirely silent in the old castle, and as no sound was heard but the eternal murmur of the surge—that mighty breathing of the sea—with her pure, thrilling and harmonious voice she began a couplet of the psalms which was then in great favor with the Puritans

"Thou leavest us, oh, Lord!
To prove if we are strong;
But then, Thou dost afford
The need that to exertion should belong."

These verses were not excellent—they were indeed far enough from it; but as every one knows, the Protestant did not pride themselves on poetry.

Even as she sung Her Ladyship listened. The sentinel on duty had stopped as if transformed to stone. Her Ladyship judged by that of the effect she had produced

She then continued her psalm with a fervor and feeling which are indescribable. It seemed to her as though the sound diffused itself afar off beneath the arches and went like a magic charm to melt the hearts of her oppressors. Nevertheless it appeared as if the soldier on guard, a zealous Catholic no doubt, shook off the charm, for through the wicket which he opened he exclaimed:

"Be silent, madame! Your song is as melancholy as a '*de profundis*;' and if, besides the pleasure of being shut up in this garrison, we must be compelled also to hear these things, it will be perfectly unbearable."

"Silence there!" cried a severe voice which the lady recognized as that of Felton. "What business is it of yours, fellow? Did any one order you to hinder that woman from singing? No. You were told to guard her, to fire upon her if she attempted to escape. Guard her, then; shoot her if she tries to escape; but do not go beyond your orders."

A gleam of inexpressible joy illuminated the lady's countenance, but this expression was transient as the lightning's flash, and without appearing to have heard the dialogue, of which she had not lost a word, she resumed her singing, giving to her voice all the charm, all the power, all the seduction with which Satan had endowed it:

"For all my fears and cares,
For exile and for chains,
I have my youth, my prayers,
And God, who keeps a record of my pains."

That voice, of uncommon power and sublime passion, gave to the rude, unpolished poetry of these psalms a magic and an expression which the most exalted Puritans rarely found in the songs of their brethren and which they were compelled to adorn with all the aids of imagination. Felton thought that he was listening to the singing of the angel who comforted the three Israelites in the fiery furnace.

The lady continued:

"But God the just and strong!
Our morn of freedom sends—
And should our hopes be wrong,
Still martyrdom, still death, our trial ends!"

This last couplet, into which the enchantress had infused her whole soul, completed the disorder in the young officer's heart. He opened the door suddenly and Her Ladyship saw his countenance, as pale as ever but with flashing and almost delirious eyes.

"Why do you sing in this manner," said he, "and in such tones?"

"Pardon me, sir," said Her Ladyship, softly; "I forgot that my songs were not becoming in this house. I have no doubt wounded your religious feelings, but I assure you that it was unintentionally. Pardon, therefore, a fault which may be great, but which was certainly involuntary."

Her Ladyship looked so beautiful at that moment and the religious enthusiasm which she had assumed had given such an expression to her countenance, that Felton, completely dazzled, fancied that he now saw the angel which he had before only heard.

"Yes, yes!" replied he, "yes, you trouble, you agitate the inhabitants of the castle."

But the poor madman did not perceive the incoherence of his own language, whilst Her Ladyship plunged her lynx eyes into the very depths of his heart.

"I will be silent," said she, casting down her eyes, with all the softness that she could give to her voice, and with all the resignation which she could impress upon her manner.

"No, no, madame," said Felton; "only do not sing so loud, and especially at night."

After these words Felton found that he could no longer preserve his usual severity toward his prisoner and he rushed out of the room.

"You are right, lieutenant," said the soldier; "those songs disturb the soul; and yet one becomes in time accustomed to them, the voice is so beautiful!"

CHAPTER LIV.

THE THIRD DAY OF IMPRISONMENT.

Felton was attracted, but more than this must yet be done—it was necessary that he should remain of himself; and Her Ladyship had only an obscure perception of the means by which this result must be achieved.

But even more was needed. He must be made to speak, that she might also speak to him, for Her Ladyship was well aware that her most seductive power was in her voice, which could run skillfully through the whole scale of tones, from mortal speech upward to the language of Heaven.

And yet in spite of all this seduction Her Ladyship might fail; Felton had been forewarned against her, even against the smallest risk. From this time she studied all her actions, all her words, and even her slightest glance and gesture, nay, even her breathing, which might be interpreted as a sigh. In short, she studied everything, like a skillful actress who has just accepted a new character in a rôle which she has never been accustomed to perform.

Before Lord de Winter her behaviour was less difficult, and she had therefore determined upon that the evening before. To remain silent and dignified in his presence—from time to time irritate him by affected contempt or by a disdainful expression—to urge him to menaces and violence, which would contrast so completely with her own perfect resignation—such was Her Ladyship's plan. Felton would see this; perhaps he would say nothing, but at any rate he would see it.

In the morning Felton came as usual, but Her Ladyship allowed him to preside over all the preparations for breakfast without addressing him. At the very moment that he was about to leave the room she had a gleam of hope, for she thought that he was really about to speak; but his lips moved without any sound issuing from

them, and controlling himself by an effort, he suppressed in his own breast the words which he had nearly uttered, and withdrew.

About noon Lord de Winter entered.

It was rather a fine summer's day, and a beam of that pale English sun, which gives light but no warmth, penetrated through the bars of the prison.

Her Ladyship looked out of the window, and pretended not to have heard the door open.

"Ah, ah!" said Lord de Winter, "after having tried comedy and tragedy we are now doing melancholy."

The prisoner did not answer.

"Yes, yes," continued his lordship; "I understand it very well. You would gladly be free upon this beach. You would gladly enough, in some good ship, glide through the waves of that sea, which is as green as an emerald. You would gladly enough, whether on land or on the ocean, concoct against me one of those pretty little plots which you are so dexterous in contriving. Patience, patience! In four days you shall be permitted to approach the beach and the sea will be open to you—more open, perhaps, than you would wish—for in four days England will be rid of you."

Her Ladyship clasped her hands and raised her eyes to Heaven.

"Lord! Lord!" exclaimed she, with an angelic sweetness of gesture and of intonation, "forgive this man, as I myself forgive him!"

"Yes, pray, accursed creature!" exclaimed the baron. "Your prayer is the more generous, as you are in the power of a man who, I swear, will never pardon you."

And he left the room.

At the moment he went out a piercing glance through the half opened door enabled her to perceive Felton, who drew back quickly that he might not be seen.

She sank upon her knees and began to pray.

"My God! my God!" said she, "Thou knowest for what sacred cause I suffer; give me, therefore, strength to bear my trials."

The door opened softly; the beautiful suppliant pretended not to have heard it and, with a voice almost suffocated by tears, she continued:

"Oh, God, the avenger! oh, God of mercy! wilt Thou permit the wicked designs of this man to be accomplished?"

Then only she appeared to hear the sound of Felton's footsteps, and rising as quick as thought, she blushed, as though ashamed at being seen upon her knees.

"I do not like to interrupt those who pray," gravely observed Felton, "so do not disturb yourself on my account, I beseech you, madame."

"How do you know that I was praying, sir?" said Her Ladyship, in a voice suffocated by sobs; "you are mistaken, sir, I was not praying."

"Do you think, then, madame," replied Felton, in his habitual grave voice, but with a gentler accent, "that I assume the right of hindering a fellow-creature from throwing herself at the feet of her Creator? God forbid! Besides, repentance is becoming in the guilty, whatever crime they may have committed; and a criminal prostrate before God is sacred in my eyes."

"I guilty!" replied the lady, with a smile which would have disarmed the angel at the day of judgment. 'Guilty! Oh, my God! Thou knowest what I am! Say that I am condemned, sir; yet you know that God, who loves martyrs, sometimes permits the innocent to be condemned."

"Were you condemned, were you innocent, and were you a martyr," replied Felton, "you would have still more reason to pray, and I would myself assist you with my prayers."

"Oh, you are a just man!" exclaimed Her Ladyship, throwing herself at his feet. "I can no longer restrain myself, for fear that my strength will fail me at the moment when I must endure the trial and confess my faith. Listen, then, to the supplication of a woman in despair. They deceive you, sir. But that is not the point; I only ask one favor of you, and if you grant it I will bless you both in this world and the next."

"Speak to my superior, madame," said Felton. "Fortunately, I have no commission either to pardon or to punish; it is to one higher than I that God has given this responsibility."

"To you—no, to you alone. Listen to me, rather than contribute to my destruction and my shame."

"If you have deserved this disgrace, madame, if you have incurred this ignominy, you should bear it as an offering to God."

"What mean your words? Oh, you do not understand me! When I talk of ignominy, you think that I speak of some punishment—of imprisonment, or of death. Would to God it were so. What care I for death or imprisonment?"

"It is I who do not understand you now, madame," said Felton.

"Or who pretend that you no longer understand me," replied the prisoner, with a smile of doubt.

"No, madame, on my honor as a soldier—on my faith as a Christian!"

"What! do you not know the designs which Lord de Winter has against me?"

"I do not know them."

"Impossible! you are his confidant."

"Madame! I never tell falsehoods!"

"Oh! but he is too unreserved for you to have failed to guess them."

"Madame, I never attempt to guess anything. I always wait for confidence; and except what Lord de Winter has said in your presence he has told me nothing."

"Then," exclaimed the lady, with an indescribable accent of truth, "you are not his accomplice? You do not know that he destines for me a disgrace which all the punishments on earth could not equal in horror?"

"You are mistaken, madame," said Felton, coloring; "Lord de Winter is not capable of such a crime."

"Good!" said the lady to herself; "without knowing what it is he calls it a crime."

Then she added aloud:

"The friend of the wretch is capable of anything."

"And whom do you call a wretch?" said Felton.

"Are there, then, two men in England to whom that erm can be appropriate?"

"You mean George Villiers?" said Felton.

"Whom the pagans, the Gentiles and the infidels call Duke of Buckingham," resumed Her Ladyship. "I would not have believed that there was a man in all England who would have required so much explanation o recognize the person I alluded to."

"The hand of the Lord is stretched over him; he will ot escape the punishment that he deserves."

Felton only expressed, concerning the duke, that entiment of execration which had been vowed by every nglishman against him, whom Catholics themselves alled the tyrant, the extortioner and the profligate, and hom the Puritans simply termed Satan.

"Oh, my God! my God!" exclaimed the lady, "when beseech thee to inflict upon that man the punishment hich is his due, Thou knowest that I seek not the atification of my own revenge, but that I implore the eliverance of a whole nation."

"Do you know him, then, madame?" inquired elton.

"He questions me at last," said Her Ladyship to herelf, delighted at having so quickly gained the great sult.

"Oh, yes, I know him. Oh, yes, to my misfortune—o my eternal misfortune."

And Her Ladyship threw up her arms, as if in a aroxysm of grief.

Felton no doubt felt that his strength was giving ay; he made some steps toward the door, but the risoner, who did not lose sight of him, bounded after im and stopped his progress.

"Sir," said she, "be good—hear my prayer! That nife of which the fatal prudence of the baron deprived e because he knew the use I should make of it—oh, ear me to the end—that knife, return it to me only for

one instant, for mercy's sake, for pity's sake! I clasp your knees. See, you may shut the door, I do not want to injure you. Oh, God! How could I have any design against you—you, the only just and good and compassionate being that I have met with—you, perhaps my preserver. One minute the knife—only one minute! I will return it to you through the wicket of the door. Only one minute, Mr. Felton, and you will have saved my honor!"

"To kill yourself!" exclaimed Felton, in great terror and forgetting to withdraw his hands from the hands of his prisoner; "to kill yourself!"

"I have said it, sir," murmured the lady, dropping her voice and sinking exhausted on the floor; "I have divulged my secret. He knows all, and oh, my God! I am lost!"

Felton remained standing, motionless and undecided.

"He still doubts," thought the lady. "I have not been true enough to the character I am acting."

Some one was heard in the corridor and Her Ladyship recognized the slow step of Lord de Winter.

Felton also recognized it and approached the door.

Her Ladyship rushed forward.

"Oh! not one word!" she cried, in a concentrated voice. "Not one word of what I have said to you to that man, or I am lost, and it is you—you——"

Then, as the steps drew near, she was silent, lest her voice should be heard, and merely pressed her beautiful hand on Felton's lips, with a gesture of infinite terror.

Felton softly repulsed her and she sank upon a couch.

Lord de Winter passed by the door without stopping and his departing steps were heard in the distance.

Felton, pale as a corpse, stood for some moments intently listening; then, when the sound had entirely ceased, he breathed like a man awaking from a dream, and rushed out of the room.

"Ah!" said Her Ladyship, as she listened in turn to the sound of Felton's steps, as he retreated in the direc-

tion opposite to that of Lord de Winter, " at last, then, you are mine."

But instantly her countenance grew dark.

" If he should speak to the baron," said she, " I am ruined ; for the baron, who well knows that I would not destroy myself, will place me before him with a knife in my hand and he will at once perceive that all this great despair is but a farce."

She went and stood before a glass and gazed upon herself. Never had she been more beautiful.

" Oh, yes," she said, smiling, " but he will *not* tell him ! "

In the evening Lord de Winter came in when the supper was brought.

" Sir," said Her Ladyship to him, " is your presence to be a compulsory aggravation of my imprisonment, and cannot you spare me that additional torture which your visits cause me ? "

" Why, my dear sister," said the baron, " did you not sentimentally announce to me, with that pretty mouth which is to-day so cruel, that you came to England for the sole purpose of seeing me without restraint—a pleasure of which you told me you felt the privation so strongly that you had for it risked seasickness, storms, and captivity ? Well, here I am and you ought to be satisfied. But besides, I have a particular reason for my visit this time."

Her Ladyship shuddered, for she thought that Felton had spoken. Never, perhaps, in her whole life, had this woman, who had experienced so many strong and opposite emotions, felt her heart beat so violently. She was sitting down. Lord de Winter took a chair, drew it to her side and seated himself upon it ; then he took from his pocket a paper which he slowly unfolded.

" Here," said he ; " I wished to show you the sort of passport which I have myself drawn up and which will serve as a kind of warrant in the life which I permit you to lead."

Then directing Her Ladyship's eyes to the paper, he read :

"'Order to convey to——'

"The name is left blank," said the baron; "if yo have any preference you will let me know and, provide it be a thousand leagues from London, your reque shall be attended to. So I resume: 'Order to conve to —— Charlotte Backson, branded by the justice the kingdom of France, but liberated after punishmen She will reside in that place, without ever going mo than three leagues from it. In case of any attempt t escape, she is to be put to death. She will be allowe five shillings a day for her lodging and support.'"

"This warrant does not concern me," said Her Lady ship, coldly, "since a name is inserted in it which is nc mine."

"A name! And have you one?"

"I have that of your brother."

"You make a mistake; my brother was only you second husband and your first is still alive. Tell m his name and I will insert it instead of Charlotte Backson No, you will not—you are silent. Very well; you shal be registered under the name of Charlotte Backson."

Her Ladyship remained silent, not now from affectation, but from fear. She believed that the warrant was to be immediately executed; she thought that Lord de Winter had hurried forward her departure; she thought, herself condemned to go that very evening. For an instant, therefore, she imagined that all hope was gone, when she suddenly perceived that the warrant had no signature.

The joy she experienced at this discovery was so great that she was unable to conceal it.

"Yes, yes," said Lord de Winter, who saw what was passing in her mind; "yes, you are looking for the signature, and you say to yourself: 'All is not lost since the warrant is not signed! He shows it to me to frighten me, that is all.' But you deceive yourself; this warrant will be sent to-morrow to the Duke of Buckingham; on the day after it will be signed by his hand and sealed with his seal; and twenty-four hours

after, I answer for it, that the execution of it shall have begun. Adieu, madame; that is all I have to say to you."

"And I reply to you, sir, that this abuse of power, this banishment under a false name, is infamous!"

"Would your ladyship prefer being hanged under your true name? You know that the English laws are inexorable concerning the abuse of the marriage contract. Explain yourself freely. Although my name, or rather my brother's, is mixed up with all this, I will risk the scandal of a public trial to be sure of my aim in getting rid of you."

Her Ladyship made no answer, but she became as pale as a lifeless form.

"Oh, I see you would rather travel. Very well, madame; there is a proverb which says that traveling is beneficial to youth. Faith, you are right, after all. Life is sweet, and that is the reason why I am not very anxious that you should take mine away. There remains, then, only the settlement of the five shillings a day. I am a little too parsimonious, am I not? But it is because I do not wish you to corrupt your keepers. Besides, you will still have your charms to seduce them with. Try them, if your failure with Felton has not disgusted you with attempts of that kind."

"Felton has not spoken," said Her Ladyship to herself; "so nothing is lost, after all."

"And now, madame, farewell; to-morrow I shall come and apprise you of the departure of my messenger."

Lord de Winter arose, bowed sarcastically to Her Ladyship and left the room.

Her Ladyship breathed again. She had yet four days before her, and four days would suffice for her to obtain complete mastery over Felton.

And yet a terrible idea suggested itself to her mind. Perhaps Lord de Winter might send Felton himself with the warrant to Buckingham, and thus Felton would escape her; to insure her success it was necessary that the magic charm of her seduction should be undisturbed.

Yet, as we have said, one thing reassured her—Felton had not spoken.

She did not wish to appear disheartened by the threat of Lord de Winter; she therefore sat down at table and ate. Then, as she had done the night before, she fell upon her knees and repeated her prayers aloud. And, as on the previous evening, the soldier ceased his walk and stood to listen.

But she soon heard steps, lighter than those of the sentinel, approaching from the end of the corridor and stopping before her door.

"It is he!" she said; and she began the same religious strains which had so violently excited Felton on the evening before.

But although her soft, full, sonorous voice now thrilled more touchingly and more harmoniously than ever, the door continued closed. It did indeed appear to Her Ladyship, in one of those furtive glances which she directed to the little wicket, that she could perceive through the close grating the ardent eyes of the young man; but whether this was a reality or a vision, he had at least sufficient self-control on this occasion to keep himself from coming in.

Yet in a few moments after the conclusion of her religious hymn Her Ladyship fancied that she heard a deep sigh, and then the same steps that she had heard approaching retired slowly and, as it were, reluctantly.

CHAPTER LV.

THE FOURTH DAY OF IMPRISONMENT.

WHEN Felton entered the room the next day he found Her Ladyship mounted on a chair, holding in her hand a cord made of some cambric handkerchiefs, torn into strips, twisted together, and fastened end to end. At the noise Felton made in opening the door Her Lady-

hip lightly jumped off her chair and endeavored to conceal behind her the extemporaneous cord which she held n her hand.

The young man was even more pale than usual and his yes, red from want of sleep, proved that he had passed hrough a feverish night. And yet his forehead was hore serenely austere than ever.

He slowly advanced toward Her Ladyship, who had eated herself, and took hold of the end of this murderus woof, which inadvertently, or perhaps intentionally, he had left unconcealed.

"What is this, madame?" he asked, coldly.

"That? Nothing!" said Her Ladyship, smiling with hat melancholy expression which she so well knew how o impress upon her smile. "Weariness, you know, is he mortal enemy of prisoners. I was wearied, and therefore I amused myself with twisting this cord."

Felton cast his eyes up to that part of the wall where e had seen Her Ladyship standing on the chair which he was now sitting on, and above her head he saw a ilded hook fastened in the wall, which was placed there o support either clothes or arms.

He started, and the prisoner saw him start, for, though er eyes were cast down, nothing escaped her observaon.

"And why were you standing on this chair?" he asked.

"What does it signify to you?" replied the lady.

"But," resumed Felton, "I desire to know."

"Do not question me," said the prisoner; "you know hat to us true Christians it is forbidden to speak falsehood."

"Well," said Felton, "I will tell you what you were oing, or rather, what you were about to do. You were bout to complete the fatal work which you meditated. emember, madame, if your God has forbidden you to peak falsehood, He has much more emphatically forbidden you to commit suicide."

"When God sees one of His creatures unjustly perecuted—placed, as it were, between suicide and dis-

honor—believe me, sir," replied Her Ladyship, in a tone of profound conviction, "God will pardon suicide, for suicide then becomes martyrdom."

"You either say too much or too little. Speak, madame; in the name of Heaven explain yourself."

"What! Shall I relate my misfortunes to you, that you may treat them as fables—shall I tell you my designs, that you may disclose them to my persecutor? No, sir. Besides, of what consequence can the life or death of an unhappy convict be to you? You are only responsible for my body, are you not? And provided you produced a dead body which could be recognized as mine, no more would be required of you and you might perhaps even receive a double reward."

"I, madame!" exclaimed Felton. "Then do you suppose that I would ever receive a price for your life? Oh, you do not believe what you are saying!"

"Leave me to myself, Felton, leave me to myself," said Her Ladyship, with some excitement; "every soldier ought to be ambitious, ought he not? You are a lieutenant; well, you would follow at my funeral with the rank of captain."

"But what have I done to you, then?" said Felton, much agitated, "that you should burden me with such a heavy responsibility before God and man? In a few days you will be far from here, madame. Your life will then be no longer under my care, and," he added, with a sigh, "then—then you can do with it what you will."

"So!" exclaimed Her Ladyship, as though unable to restrain her holy indignation. "You, a pious man—you, who are regarded as a just man—you only demand one thing, and that is, not to be inculpated, not to be inconvenienced, by my death."

"It is my duty to watch over your life, madame, and I will do so."

"But do you understand the duty you discharge? It is cruel, even if I were guilty; but what name will you give it—with what term will the Almighty brand it—if I am innocent?"

"I am a soldier, madame, and I execute the orders that I have received."

"And do you believe that at the day of final judgment the Almighty will make a distinction between the hoodwinked executioner and the unrighteous judge? You will not allow me to kill my body and yet you make yourself the instrument of him who wishes to kill my soul!"

"But I repeat to you," said Felton, much moved, "that no danger threatens you; I will answer for Lord de Winter as for myself."

"Madman!" exclaimed Her Ladyship, "poor madman, who presumes to answer for another, when the wisest, those who are the most after God's own heart, are afraid of answering for themselves, and who join the party of the strongest and most fortunate, to overwhelm the weakest and most miserable!"

"Impossible, madame, impossible!" muttered Felton, as he felt in his heart's core the justice of this argument; "whilst a prisoner, you will not recover your liberty through me; whilst alive, you will not lose your life by my connivance."

"Yes," exclaimed Her Ladyship, "but I shall lose what is much dearer to me than life—I shall lose my honor, Felton; and it is you whom I will make responsible, before God and man, for my shame and infamy!"

On this occasion, Felton, insensible as he was, or as he pretended to be, could no longer resist the secret influence which had already enthralled him. To see this woman, so beautiful, fair as the brightest vision—to hear her by turns imploring and threatening—to suffer at the same time the ascendency of grief and beauty, was too much for a visionary man, the strength of whose brain was sapped by the ardent dreams of an ecstatic faith; it was too much for a heart corroded at the same time by the love of Heaven, which burns, and by the hatred of mankind, which destroys.

Her Ladyship perceived his agitation; she felt in-

tuitively the contending passions which burned with the blood in the young fanatic's veins; and, like a skillful general, who sees the enemy preparing to retreat, and then rushes upon him with a shout of victory, she arose —beautiful as a priestess of antiquity, inspired as a Christian virgin—and, with extended arms, and neck uncovered, and disheveled hair—with a hand modestly confining her dress upon her bosom and with a glance illuminated by that fire which had already carried disorder into the senses of the young Puritan, she walked toward him, uttering to an impetuous air, in that sweet voice to which she gave so terrible an emphasis:

"To Baal his victim send;
To lions cast the martyr;
Yet vengeance is God's charter,
To him my cries ascend."

Felton stood like one petrified.

"Who are you? What are you?" exclaimed he, clasping his hands; "are you an angel or a demon? Are you Eloas or Astarte?"

"Have you not recognized me, Felton? I am neither angel nor demon; I am but a daughter of the earth, a sister in your faith—nothing more!"

"Yes, yes," said Felton. "I suspected it at first, but now I am convinced."

"You are convinced! And yet you are the accomplice of that child of Belial whom men call Lord de Winter. You are convinced and yet you leave me in the hands of my enemies—of the enemy of England, and of the enemy of God! You are convinced and yet you deliver me up to him who fills and pollutes the world with his heresies and debaucheries—to that infamous Sardanapalus, whom the blind call Buckingham and the believers Antichrist!"

"I deliver you up to Buckingham! I! What is the meaning of your words?"

"They have eyes," exclaimed the lady, "and they will not see; they have ears, and they will not hear."

"Yes, yes," said Felton, drawing his hand over his damp brow, as if to drag away his last remaining doubt; "yes, I recognize the voice that speaks to me in my dreams; yes, I recognize the features of the angel which visits me each night, crying to my sleepless soul: 'Strike! save England! save thyself! for thou wilt die without having appeased the Lord!' Speak!" cried Felton, "speak! I can understand you now."

A flash of fearful delight, but rapid as thought, gleamed from Her Ladyship's eyes.

Fugitive as was this homicidal glance, Felton perceived it and started, as if it had thrown light into the dark abysses of that woman's heart.

He suddenly recalled the warnings of Lord de Winter, the seductions of Her Ladyship and her first attempts on her arrival; he retreated a step, and drooped his head, but without ceasing to look at her; as if, fascinated by this singular being, he could not turn his eyes away.

Her Ladyship was not the woman to misunderstand the meaning of this hesitation. In the midst of these apparent emotions her icy coolness did not leave her. Before receiving Felton's answer, which would have obliged her to resume this conversation, impossible to sustain in the same exalted strain, she let her hands fall, as if the weakness of the woman resumed its ascendency over the enthusiasm of the inspired saint.

"But no," said she, "it is not for me to be the Judith who will deliver Bethulia from this Holofernes. The sword of the Eternal One is too heavy for my arm. Let me, then, escape dishonor by death—let me find a refuge in martyrdom. I neither ask for liberty, like a criminal, nor for vengeance, like a pagan. To be allowed to die is all that I demand. I entreat you, I implore you on my knees, let me die! and my last sigh shall breathe forth a blessing on my preserver!"

At this voice, so soft and supplicating—at this look, so timid and submissive, Felton advanced toward her. By degrees the enchantress had resumed that magic

charm which she took up and laid aside at pleasure; that is to say, beauty, softness, tears, and above all the irresistible attraction of that mystical voluptuousness which is the most irresistible of all voluptuousness.

"Alas!" said Felton, "I can only pity you, if you prove to me that you are a victim. But Lord de Winter makes most serious complaints against you. You are a Christian woman, you are my sister in the faith. I feel myself drawn toward you—I, who have never loved any one but my benefactor—I, who have only found traitors and infidels throughout my life. But you, madame—you, so truly beautiful—you, apparently so pure, must have committed many crimes for Lord de Winter to pursue you thus."

"They have eyes," repeated the lady, with indescribable softness, "and they will not see; they have ears, and they will not hear."

"But then," exclaimed the young officer, "speak, oh, speak!"

"What, confide my shame to you!" exclaimed the lady, with the blush of modesty upon her face; "often the crime of one is the shame of another. To confide my crime to you, a man, and I a woman! Oh!" she continued, modestly placing her hand before her eyes, "oh, never, never could I dare."

"To me, as to a brother!" exclaimed Felton. The lady gazed at him for a long time with an expression which Felton took for doubt, but which was, nevertheless, only observation and a desire to fascinate.

A suppliant in his turn, Felton clasped his hands.

"Well, then!" exclaimed the lady, "I will dare trust my brother."

At this moment the step of Lord de Winter was heard. But the dreaded brother-in-law was not content, this time, merely to pass the door, as he had done the evening before; he stopped, and after exchanging two words with the sentinel, he opened the door and entered.

Whilst these two words were being spoken, Felton had rapidly moved from the lady's side, and when Lord de

Winter appeared he was standing at some distance from the prisoner.

The baron entered slowly and cast a searching glance from the prisoner to the young officer.

"You have been here a long time, John," said he. "Has this woman related her crimes to you? If so, I can comprehend the length of the interview."

Felton started, and Her Ladyship felt that she was lost if she did not come to the assistance of the disconcerted Puritan.

"Ah! you feared that your prisoner had escaped you!" said she. "Well! ask your jailer what favor I was but now soliciting of him."

"And were you asking a favor?" said the baron, suspiciously.

"Yes, my lord," replied the young man, much confused.

"And what favor? Come, let us hear," added Lord de Winter.

"A knife, which she would return to me through the wicket an instant after she had received it," replied Felton.

"Is there any one, then, concealed here, whose throat this gracious person wishes to cut?" inquired Lord de Winter, in a tone of mockery and contempt.

"Yes, I am here!" replied Her Ladyship.

"I gave you your choice between America and Tyburn," replied Lord de Winter; "choose Tyburn, my lady; the rope is, believe me, surer than the knife."

Felton grew pale and made one step forward, for he remembered that when he came in the lady held a cord in her hand.

"You are right," said she, "and I had already thought of it." Then she added in a lower voice, "I will think of it again."

Felton shuddered even to the very marrow of his bones. Lord de Winter probably observed it, for he said:

"John, my friend, beware. I have placed my con-

fidence in you; be watchful, I have warned you. Besides, be of good cheer, my boy; in three days we shall get rid of this creature, and where I send her she can never again injure any one."

"You hear him!" cried Her Ladyship, with a burst of indignation, which the baron thought was addressed to Heaven, but which Felton comprehended was for him.

Felton held down his head and mused.

The baron took the officer by the arm, turning his head over his shoulder so as not to lose sight of the lady while he was in the room.

"Come, come," reasoned the prisoner, when the door was shut, "I am not so far advanced as I believe myself to be. De Winter has changed his customary stupidity into unparalleled prudence. This is the desire of vengeance and thus does that desire form a man! As to Felton, he wavers. Ah! he is not a man of resolution like that cursed D'Artagnan. A Puritan adores only virgins and adores them with clasped hands; a musketeer adores women and loves them with arms clasped around them."

Nevertheless, Her Ladyship remained in anxious expectation. She thought that the day would not pass away without her seeing Felton again. At last, about an hour after the scene we have just narrated, she heard some whispering at the door, which was soon afterward opened, and she recognized Felton.

The young man came hastily into the room, leaving the door open behind him, and signed to Her Ladyship to be silent. His countenance was fearfully excited.

"What do you want?" said she.

"Listen!" replied Felton, in a slow voice. "I have just dismissed the sentinel, that I may remain here without any one knowing that I am come, and speak to you without any one overhearing what I say. The baron has just related to me a terrible tale."

The lady assumed her smile of a resigned victim and shook her head.

"Either you are a demon," continued Felton, "or the

baron—my benefactor, my more than father—is a monster. I have known you for four days—I have loved him ten years; therefore I may well hesitate between you two. Be not alarmed at what I say; I want to be convinced. This night, after midnight, I shall come to you and you must convince me."

"No, Felton—no, my brother," said she, "the sacrifice is too great and I see what it will cost you. No, I am lost; do not destroy yourself with me. My death will be far more eloquent than my life and the silence of the dead body will convince you better than the living prisoner's words."

"Be silent, madame," said Felton, "and do not speak to me thus. I have come that you may promise me upon your honor—that you may swear to me by that which is most sacred to you—that you will not make any attempt upon your life."

"I will not promise," said Her Ladyship; "for no one respects an oath more than I do, and if I promise I must keep my word."

"Well," said Felton, "bind yourself only till I have seen you once again. If, after we have met, you still persist, you will then be free, and I myself shall then provide you with the weapon you have asked for."

"So be it!" said Her Ladyship; "for your sake I will wait."

"Swear it!"

"I swear it by our God! Are you satisfied?"

"Well," said Felton, "this night."

And he rushed out of the apartment, shut the door again and waited outside, with the soldier's half-pike in his hand, as if he were mounting guard.

The soldier having returned, Felton gave him back his weapon.

Then through the wicket which she had approached, Her Ladyship saw the young man cross himself with delirious fervor and hurry along the corridor in a transport of delight.

As for herself she returned to her seat with a smile of

savage scorn upon her lips and she blasphemously repeated the fearful name of that God by whom she had just sworn without ever having learned to know Him.

"My God!" she said. "Fanatical fool! *My* God is myself, and he who will assist in my revenge!"

CHAPTER LVI.

THE FIFTH DAY OF IMPRISONMENT.

MILADY had, however, achieved a half-triumph, and the success she had obtained renewed her strength.

There was no difficulty in vanquishing, as she had hitherto done, men ready to be led astray, and whom the education of a gallant court swiftly drew into her snares. Her Ladyship was beautiful enough to fascinate the senses and skillful enough to prevail over all the obstacles of mind.

But on this occasion she had to strive against an untutored nature, concentrated and made impassible by austerity. Religion and penitence had made of Felton a man impenetrable to all ordinary seductions. Schemes so vast, projects so tumultuous, were floating in that fervid brain that there was no room for love—the sentiment that feeds itself on leisure and thrives and fattens on corruption. Her Ladyship had, by her pretended virtue, made a breach in the opinion of a man prejudiced against her, and, by her beauty, in the heart and senses of a pure and candid man. By this experiment upon the most rebellious subject that nature and religion could submit to her consideration, she had at last taken the measurement of powers hitherto unknown even to herself.

Often, however, during the evening, had she despaired of fate and of herself. We know that she did not invoke the aid of God; she trusted in the genius of evil, that boundless sovereignty which rules over the details of

human life and for which, as in the Arabian fable, a pomegranate seed suffices to build up again a ruined world.

Her Ladyship being quite ready to receive Felton, was at liberty to make her batteries ready for the next day. She well knew that only two days remained for her; that, were the warrant once signed by Buckingham—and Buckingham would sign it the more freely, as it bore a false name and he could not recognize the real woman whom it concerned—this warrant once signed, we say, the baron would immediately send her on board; and she knew also, that women condemned to transportation use in their seductions arms much less powerful than those pretended virtuous women whose beauty is illumined by the sun of fashion, whose wit is vaunted by the voice of the world, and whom an aristocratic beam gilds with its enchanted light. To be a woman condemned to a wretched and disgraceful punishment is no impediment to beauty, but is an insurmountable obstacle to power. Like all persons of real genius, Her Ladyship well knew what accorded with her nature and her means. Poverty disgusted her; subjection deprived her of two-thirds of her greatness. Her Ladyship was only a queen amongst queens; the enjoyment of satisfied pride was essential to her sway. To command beings of an inferior nature was to her rather a humiliation than a pleasure.

She should most assuredly return from her banishment—of that she had not the slightest doubt; but how long would that banishment continue? To an active and ambitious nature like that of Her Ladyship, the days which are not spent in self-elevation are unlucky ones. What, then, can we call the days of bitter descent? To lose one, two, three years, that is an actual eternity; to return, perhaps, after the death or the disgrace of the cardinal; to return when D'Artagnan and his friends, happy and successful, had received from the queen the recompense that they so richly merited by their services to her—these were the devouring thoughts which a woman like Her Ladyship was quite

unable to endure. Besides, the storm which raged in her breast was increasing in its violence, and she would have burst her prison walls if her body could have attained for a single instant the same proportions as her soul.

And then, in the midst of all this, she was goaded by the remembrance of the cardinal. What would be thought, what would be said of her silence by that cardinal, so distrustful, so anxious, and so suspicious—that cardinal, who was not only her sole support, her sole stay, her sole protector for the present, but also the principal instrument of her future fortune and revenge? She knew him well; she knew that on her return from a fruitless expedition she would in vain talk of her imprisonment, she would in vain exaggerate her sufferings. The cardinal would answer, with the mocking calmness of the skeptic, strong at once in power and in genius: "You should not have allowed yourself to be entrapped."

Her Ladyship then concentrated all her energy, murmuring forth, in the intricacies of her thought, the name of Felton, the sole gleam of light which visited her in the depths of that hell into which she had fallen; and like a serpent coiling and uncoiling its rings, to satisfy itself of its own strength, she, by anticipation, enveloped Felton in the countless folds of her own inventive imagination.

Yet time rolled on. The hours, one after the other, appeared to arouse the clock as they passed; every stroke vibrated in the prisoner's heart. At nine o'clock Lord de Winter paid his customary visit; looked at the windows and bars, sounded the floorings and the walls, and examined the chimney and the doors; yet, during this long and minute investigation, not one word was uttered either by Her Ladyship or by him.

"Come, come," said the baron, as he left the room, "you will not escape to-night."

At ten o'clock Felton came to relieve the sentinel at the door. Her Ladyship now recognized his step as a

mistress recognizes that of a lover, and yet she both hated and despised this weak fanatic.

It was not the appointed time, so Felton did not enter the room.

Two hours after, just at the stroke of twelve, the sentinel was relieved.

And now the time had come, and from this moment Her Ladyship waited with impatience.

The new sentinel began to walk along the corridor.

In ten minutes Felton came. Her Ladyship listened.

"Observe," said the young man to the sentinel, "on no account whatever are you to leave this door; for you know that a soldier was punished for leaving his post for a moment last night, although it was I who kept guard during his short absence."

"Yes, I know it," said the soldier.

"I advise you, therefore, to adopt the strictest vigilance. For my part, I am going to inspect the room again and to observe this woman, who has, I fear, conceived some violent designs against herself. My orders are to watch her closely."

"Good!" murmured Her Ladyship. "There is the austere Puritan telling a lie."

The soldier smiled.

"By Jove, lieutenant," said he, "you are not very unlucky in getting such a commission."

Felton blushed. Under any other circumstances he would have rebuked the soldier who indulged in such a joke; but his own conscience was now incriminating him too loudly to permit his tongue to speak.

"If I call," said he, "come in; and also, if any one comes call me."

"Yes, sir," said the soldier.

Felton entered the room. Her Ladyship arose.

"You have come," said she.

"I promised to come," replied Felton, "and I am here."

"You promised me something else, also," said she.

"What, then, oh, my God!" said the young man,

who, in spite of all his self-command, felt his knees tremble and his brow grow damp.

"You promised to bring me a knife and to leave it with me after our interview."

"Do not speak of that, madame," said Felton; "there is no situation, however terrible it may be, that can authorize one of God's creatures to destroy himself. I have reflected that I never ought to render myself guilty of such a crime."

"Ah, you have reflected!" said the prisoner, again seating herself in her chair, with a disdainful smile. "And I, also, have reflected."

"About what?"

"That I had nothing to say to a man who did not keep his word."

"Oh, my God!" murmured Felton.

"You may leave the room," said Her Ladyship; "I shall not speak."

"Here is the knife," said Felton, taking from his pocket the weapon which he had, according to his promise, brought, although he hesitated to intrust it to his prisoner.

"Let me look at it," said the lady.

"For what purpose?" said Felton.

"Upon my honor I will return it immediately. You may lay it on the table and stand between it and me."

Felton gave the weapon to Her Ladyship, who examined it attentively and tried its point upon the end of her finger.

"Very well," said she, returning the knife to the young officer; "it is a serviceable weapon; you are a faithful friend, Felton."

Felton took the knife and laid it upon the table, as had been agreed with the prisoner.

Her Ladyship's eyes followed him with a satisfied glance.

"Now," said she, "listen to me."

The injunction was unnecessary, for the young man

stood before her, waiting for her words, that he might feast upon them.

"Felton," said Her Ladyship, with a melancholy solemnity, "Felton, if your sister, the daughter of your father, should say to you,—Whilst still young, and unfortunately beautiful, I was decoyed into a snare, but I resisted; temptations and assaults were multiplied around me, but I resisted; the religion that I serve and the God whom I adore were blasphemed because I called that God and that religion to my aid, and I resisted; then outrages were heaped upon me and, as they could not sacrifice my soul, they determined forever to defile my body; at last——"

Her Ladyship stopped and a bitter smile was visible on her lips.

"At last," said Felton, "and what did they do at last?"

"At last they resolved one night to paralyze that resistance which they could not overcome; one night they mixed a powerful narcotic with my drink. Scarcely had I finished my repast before I found myself sinking gradually into an unusual torpor. Although I had no suspicions, yet a nameless dread made me struggle against this drowsiness. I arose; I endeavored to reach the window, to call for help; but my limbs refused to bear me up, it seemed to me as if the ceiling lowered itself on my head and crushed me with its weight. I stretched forth my arms and endeavored to speak but could only utter inarticulate sounds; an irresistible numbness stole upon me and I clung to my chair, feeling that I was about to fall, but even this support was soon insufficient for my feeble arms; I fell first on one knee, then on both; I sought to pray, but my tongue was frozen—God neither saw nor heard me, and I sank upon the floor, subjugated by a sleep resembling death.

"Of all the time which elapsed during this sleep I had no recollection whatever. The only thing I can remember is that I awoke, and found myself transported into a circular chamber, most sumptuously furnished, into which

no light penetrated save through an aperture in the ceiling. There seemed to be no door to enter at; it looked like a magnificent prison.

"It was a long time before I could observe the place in which I was or recall the circumstances which I now relate. My mind appeared to struggle in vain against the oppressive darkness of that sleep from which I was unable to escape. I had some vague perceptions of a space passed over and of the rolling of a carriage; but all this was so misty and so indistinct, that these events appeared rather to belong to the life of some other person than to my own, and yet to be incorporated with mine through some fantastical duality.

"For some time the state in which I found myself appeared so strange that I supposed it was a dream. By degrees, however, the fearful reality forced itself upon me: I was no longer in the house I had inhabited. As well as I could judge by the light of the sun, two-thirds of the day were already spent. It was on the evening of the previous day that I had fallen asleep; my slumber had, therefore, lasted nearly twenty-four hours. What had happened during this protracted sleep?

"I arose, staggering. All my slow and torpid movements showed that the influence of the narcotic had not yet ceased. I found that my chamber had been furnished for the reception of a woman, and the most complete coquette could not have formed a wish that, in looking around the apartment, she would not have found fulfilled.

"Assuredly I was not the first captive who had been confined within that splendid prison. But you understand, Felton, the more beautiful the prison, the more was I alarmed. Yes, it was a prison, for I in vain endeavored to escape. I tried all the walls to find a door, but everywhere the walls gave back a dull and heavy sound. I went around this room perhaps twenty times, seeking some kind of outlet; there was none; and I sunk upon a chair worn out with terror and fatigue.

"In the meantime night approached rapidly and with

the night my fears increased. I knew not what to do. It seemed as if I were encompassed by unknown dangers into which I must plunge at every step. Although I had eaten nothing since the evening before, my fears prevented me from feeling hunger.

"No external noise by which I could compute the lapse of time had reached me, but I presumed that it must be about seven or eight in the evening, for we were in the month of October and it was completely dark.

"Suddenly the noise of a door turning on its hinges startled me; a ball of fire appeared above the window in the ceiling, casting a brilliant light into the room, and I perceived with horror that a man was standing at a few paces from me.

"A table with two covers, with a supper all prepared, was arranged, as if by magic, in the middle of the room.

"And this man was he who had pursued me for a year, who had sworn my dishonor, and who, from the first words which fell from his lips, left me no hope of being at any future time restored to liberty."

"The wretch!" murmured Felton.

"Oh, yes, the wretch!" exclaimed Her Ladyship, seeing the interest which the young officer, whose soul seemed hanging on her lips, took in the strange tale; "oh, yes, the wretch! He thought that it was quite enough to have carried me off in my sleep; he now came, hoping that I would yield to my shame, since that shame was consummated—he came to offer me his fortune in exchange for my love.

"Everything that a woman's heart can realize of haughty scorn and contemptuous speech I poured out upon that man. Undoubtedly he was habituated to such reproaches, for he listened to me with a calm and smiling look and with his arms folded on his breast; and then, when he thought I had no more to say, he approached to take my hand. I rushed toward the table, seized a knife and placed it to my bosom. 'Take one step more!' I cried, 'and, besides my dishonor, you shall have to answer for my death!'

"Doubtless there was in my look, my voice, my whole appearance, that character of truth which carries conviction into the most wicked minds, for he stopped.

"'Your death!' cried he. 'Oh, no! you are too charming a creature for me to consent to lose you so. Adieu, fair one; I shall wait until you are in a better temper before I pay you another visit.'

"At these words he whistled, and the flaming globe which illumined my room ascended and disappeared. I found myself once more in total darkness. The same noise of a door opening and shutting was an instant afterward again audible; the globe of light descended anew, and I was again alone.

"This moment was frightful. Had I been at all uncertain about my misery, every doubt was now dispelled before this fearful reality. I was now in the power of a man whom I not only detested, but whom I despised—of a man who had already given me a fatal proof of what he dared to do."

"But who was that man?" demanded Felton.

Her Ladyship gave no answer to his question, but continued her tale.

"I spent the night on a chair, starting at the least noise. At about midnight the lamp went out and I was again in darkness. But the night passed away without any reappearance of my persecutor. Daylight came. The table was gone and I had still the knife in my hand. This knife was my sole hope.

"I was overwhelmed with fatigue, my eyes were burning from sleepiness; I had not dared to close them for a single instant. Daylight reassured me. I threw myself on my bed, still grasping the protecting knife, which I concealed beneath my pillow.

"When I awoke, another table was arranged. But now, in spite of my terrors, in spite of my agonies, a ravenous hunger made itself felt. For eight-and-forty hours I had tasted no nourishment. I ate some bread and a little fruit. Then remembering the narcotic mingled with the water I had drank, I did not touch

that which was on the table, but went and filled my glass from a marble reservoir fixed in the wall above my toilet table.

"And yet in spite of this precuation I remained for some time in extreme anguish; but on this occasion my fears were unfounded. I passed the day without experiencing anything that resembled what I feared. I took the precaution, however, to empty the decanter of half the water, that my distrust might not be perceived.

"The evening came, but, profound as was the darkness, my eyes began to grow accustomed to it. In the midst of this obscurity I saw the table sink into the floor; a quarter of an hour afterward it reappeared, bearing my supper; a moment later, thanks to the same lamp, my apartment was again lighted.

"I was resolved only to eat of those things with which it was impossible to mingle anything somniferous. Two eggs and some fruit composed my meal and then I drew a glass of water from my guardian fountain and drank it. After the first mouthfuls it appeared to me no longer to have the same taste as in the morning. A sudden suspicion seized me. I stopped, but I had already swallowed half a glassful. I threw the remainder away with horror, and waited, with the icy drops of terror on my brow. Some invisible witness had unquestionably seen me take water from the fountain and had taken advantage of my confidence the more certainly to accomplish my ruin, so coldly planned, so cruelly pursued.

"Half an hour had not passed over before the same symptoms began to reappear. Only, as I had now taken no more than half a glass of water, I struggled longer against them, and instead of sleeping soundly I fell into that kind of slumber which left me the perception of all that passed around me, whilst it quite deprived me of the power of resistance or defense. I dragged myself toward my bed to seek the sole defense which remained—my guardian knife. But I could not reach the pillow. I

fell upon my knees, grasping with my hands one of the posts of the bed."

Felton became fearfully pale and a convulsive shudder pervaded all his frame.

"And what was more horrible," continued the lady, her voice trembling as if she felt the anguish of that terrible moment, "was, that on this occasion I was conscious of the danger which hung over me. My soul, if I may so express myself, was watching over my sleeping body. I saw, I heard—as in a dream, it is true, but my perceptions were, on that account, only the more terrific. I saw the lamp again ascending and was gradually left in utter darkness. I then heard the sound of that door, so well known, although it had been opened but twice. I felt instinctively that some one was approaching me. It is said that the wretched beings who are lost in the deserts of America thus feel the approaches of a serpent. I wished to make an effort. I endeavored to cry out. By an incredible exertion of my will I even raised myself up, but it was only to fall again—fall into the arms of my persecutor."

"But tell me, then, who was your persecutor?" exclaimed the young officer.

Her Ladyship saw at a glance how deeply she affected Felton by dwelling on each detail of her narrative; but she did not wish to spare him any torture. The more deeply she wounded his heart, the more surely would he avenge her. So she proceeded once more as if she had not heard his exclamation, or as if she thought that the time for answering it had not yet come.

"Only this time it was not a sort of inanimate corpse with whom the wretch had to deal. I told you that, without having recovered the entire use of my faculties, I had an idea of my peril. I struggled with all my strength and, though weakened, doubtless opposed a long resistance, and heard him exclaim:

"'Oh, these miserable Puritans! I knew that they harassed their executioners, but I believed them to be less earnest in resisting their seducers.'

"Alas! this desperate resistance could not last long. I felt my strength leaving me, and this time the villain did not take advantage of my sleep, but of my swoon."

Felton listened without uttering aught but a sort of roar. The perspiration trickled down his brow, and with a hand hidden beneath his dress he tore his flesh.

"My first impulse on returning to myself," continued Her Ladyship, "was to look under my pillow for the knife, which I had been unable to reach; if it had not served as a defense it might at least be useful for an expiation. But on taking this knife, Felton, a terrible idea suggested itself to me. I have sworn to tell you everything and I will do so; I have promised you the truth, and I will tell it, though it should undo me."

"The idea suggested itself to you to revenge yourself on this man, did it not?" exclaimed Felton.

"Well, yes," said Her Ladyship, "it was as you have guessed. That idea was not becoming in a Christian, I know. Undoubtedly the eternal enemy of our souls himself breathed it into my mind. In fact—how shall I confess it, Felton?" continued Her Ladyship, in a tone of a woman accusing herself of a crime, "that idea came into my mind and has never left it since. And perhaps my present sufferings are but the punishment of the homicidal thoughts."

"Go on! go on!" said Felton; "I long to hear of the accomplishment of your revenge."

"Oh, I determined that it should be delayed as short a time as possible! I doubted not that he would return on the following night. During the day I had nothing to fear. On this account, at breakfast time I did not hesitate to eat and drink. I was resolved to pretend to sup, but to taste nothing. I must, therefore, by the morning's nourishment prepare myself to bear the evening's fast. I concealed a glass of water from my breakfast, as thirst had been my severest suffering when I remained forty-eight hours without eating or drinking.

"The day passed without producing any other effect upon me than to strengthen the resolution I had taken.

But I took care that my face should not betray the thoughts of my heart, for I doubted not that I was watched. Many times, indeed, I even felt a smile upon my lips. Felton, I dare not tell you the idea at which I smiled—you would abominate me!"

"Go on, go on," said Felton; "you see that I listen to you, and I want to know the end."

"The evening came," continued Her Ladyship, "and the usual circumstances took place. During the darkness my supper was served as usual, and then the lamp was lighted and I placed myself at table. I ate only some fruit and pretended to pour water from the decanter but drank that which I had kept in my own glass; the substitution was, however, so adroitly made that my spies, if I had any, could have no suspicion of the truth. After supper I exhibited all the appearances of the drowsiness that I had felt the evening before; but this time, as if overwhelmed with fatigue, or as if familiarized with danger, I pretended to fall asleep. I had now found my knife and, whilst I feigned to sleep, my hand convulsively grasped the handle.

"Two hours glided away without anything new occurring. On this occasion—oh, my God! who would have predicted that on the previous night!—I actually began to fear that he might fail to come.

"At last I saw the lamp gently rising and disappearing in the depths of the ceiling. My apartment became dark, but I made an effort to pierce through the gloom. About ten minutes then elapsed, during which I heard nothing but the beating of my own heart. I prayed to heaven that he might come.

"At length I heard the well-known sound of the door opening and shutting; I perceived, in spite of the thickness of the carpet, a step which made the floor creak; I saw, in spite of the darkness, a shadow which approached my couch."

"Make haste! make haste!" interrupted Felton; "do you not see that every one of your words burns me like molten lead?"

"Then," continued Her Ladyship, "I collected all my strength. I called to mind that the moment of revenge, or rather of justice, had now arrived. I looked upon myself as another Judith. I held the knife in my hand, and when I saw him near me, then, with a last cry of grief and of despair, I struck him in the middle of the breast! The wretch! he had foreseen the blow. His breast was covered by a coat of mail—the knife itself was blunted.

"'Ah! ah!' cried he, seizing me by the arm and tearing from me the weapon which had so badly served me; 'you want to kill me, my pretty Puritan; but that is more than hatred, it is ingratitude. Come, come, calm yourself, my charming child. I thought you had grown gentler. I am not one of those tyrants who keep women in opposition to their wills. You do not love me? I had my doubts about it, with my usual folly: now I am convinced of it. To-morrow you shall be free.'

"I had only one wish, which was that he would kill me.

"'Take care,' said I, 'for my liberty shall be your disgrace!'

"'Explain yourself, my beautiful sibyl.'

"'Yes, as soon as I am free, I will tell everything. I will proclaim your violence toward me—I will proclaim my captivity. I will denounce this place of infamy. You are greatly exalted, my lord, but tremble! Above you is the king, and above the king is God.'

"However great a command he had over himself, my persecutor allowed an angry gesture to escape him. I could not see the expression of his countenance, but I had felt the trembling of his arm, on which my hand rested.

"'Then you shall never leave this place,' said he.

"'Right! right!' I exclaimed; 'then the site of my punishment shall be also the site of my tomb. Right! I will die here, and you shall see whether an accusing phantom be not even more terrible than the living enemy who threatens.'

"'But you shall have no weapon.'

"'There is one which despair has placed within the reach of every creature who has courage to make use of it—I will die of hunger.'

"'Come,' said the wretch, 'is not peace of more value than such a war? I give you liberty this instant; I will proclaim your virtue, I will call you the Lucretia of England.'

"'And I will proclaim you the Sextus. I will denounce you before men, as I have already denounced you before God; and if it should be necessary that, like Lucretia, I should attest the accusation with my blood, I will attest it.'

"'Ah, ah!' said my enemy, in a tone of mockery, 'then it is quite another thing. Faith, after all, you are very well off here. You shall want for nothing, and if you allow yourself to die of hunger it will be your own fault.'

"At these words he left the room. I heard the door open and shut, and remained overwhelmed—not so much, I confess, with grief, as with the shame of having failed in my revenge.

"He kept his word. All the day and all the night of the next day passed without my seeing him; but I kept mine, also, and neither ate nor drank anything. I was resolved, as I had told him, to let myself die of hunger. I spent the day and night in prayer, for I hoped that God would forgive my self-murder. On the second night the door was opened. I was lying on the floor, for my strength began to fail me. At the noise I raised myself upon my hand.

"'Well,' said a voice which vibrated on my ear too terribly to be mistaken, 'well, have you become a little more compliant and will you purchase liberty by a mere promise of silence? Come, I am a good prince,' added he, 'and although I do not love the Puritans, I do them justice, as well as their women, when they are pretty. Come, give me a little oath upon the cross; I ask for nothing more.'

"'On the cross!' I exclaimed, raising myself up, for

on hearing that detested voice I had recovered all my strength. 'Upon the cross I swear that no promise, no threat, no torture, shall close my lips. Upon the cross I swear to denounce you everywhere as a murderer, a violator of honor, as a coward. Upon the cross I swear, if ever I accomplish my escape, to demand vengeance against you from the whole human race!'"

"'Take care!' said the voice, in a tone of menace that I had not yet heard; 'I have one expedient, which I will only employ at the last extremity, to stop your mouth, or, at least, to hinder any one from believing a syllable of what you say.'

"I rallied all my strength to answer by a laugh of scorn.

"He saw that from this time it was war to the death between us.

"'Listen,' said he; 'I give you the remainder of this night and to-morrow. Reflect! Promise to be silent, and wealth, consideration, even honor, shall surround you. Threaten to speak and I condemn you to infamy.'

"'You?' I exclaimed, 'you?'

"'To eternal, ineffaceable infamy!'

"'You?' I repeated. Oh, I assure you, Felton, I believed that he was mad.

"'Yes, I!' he replied.

"'Ah, leave me,' I cried, 'leave me, if you do not wish me to dash out my brains against the wall before your eyes.'

"'Well,' said he, 'you demand it? I therefore leave you till to-morrow evening.'

"'Till to-morrow evening,' I replied, sinking on the floor and biting the carpet in my rage."

Felton supported himself against a chair, and Her Ladyship saw with a demoniacal joy that the fortitude of the young officer would probably give way before the end of her recital.

CHAPTER LVII.

AN EVENT IN CLASSICAL TRAGEDY.

AFTER a moment's silence, which Milady employed in observing the young officer who was listening to her, she continued her story:

"For nearly three days I had neither eaten nor drank," said she, "and I was suffering dreadful tortures. Sometimes a feeling as of passing clouds, which pressed upon my brow and dimmed my sight, came over me; it was delirium. The evening arrived. I was so weak that I fainted every moment, and each time that I fainted I thanked God, for I believed that I was dying. During one of these fainting fits I heard the door open and terror recalled me to myself. My persecutor entered, followed by a man in a mask. He was himself also masked, but I recognized his step, his voice, and that commanding air which hell has given to his person for the misfortune of mankind.

"'Well,' said he, 'have you determined to take the oath which I required of you?'

"'You have yourself said the Puritans are faithful to their word, and you have already heard my resolution—it is, to appeal against you here on earth to the tribunal of men, and in Heaven to the tribunal of God.'

"'So you persist?'

"'Yes! I swear it before the God who hears me—I will call the whole world to witness to your wickedness and will never cease until I have found an avenger.'

"'You are an abandoned woman,' said he, in a voice of thunder, 'and you shall suffer the punishment of one! Tainted as you are in the eyes of that world which you invoke, try to prove to it that you are neither guilty nor insane.'

"Then addressing the man who accompanied him, said, 'Executioner, do your duty!'"

"Oh! his name!" cried Felton, in a new burst of rage; "tell me his name!"

"Then, in spite of cries, in spite of my resistance, for I began to understand that something worse than death was meditated against me, the executioner seized me, threw me on the floor and bound me so as to wound and bruise me by his violence; and then, whilst I was suffocated by my sobs, almost senseless, and calling aloud on that God who did not listen to my cries, I uttered suddenly a fearful shriek of agony and shame. A burning instrument, a red-hot iron, the brand of the executioner, had been stamped upon my shoulder!"

Felton groaned.

"Look!" said Her Ladyship, rising with all the majesty of a queen; "look, Felton, how a new kind of martyrdom has been invented for a pure young girl, the victim of a monster's brutal crime. Learn to know the hearts of men, and henceforth be more reluctant to become the instrument of their unjust revenge."

Her Ladyship, with a rapid motion, threw open her robe, tore away the cambric which covered her bosom, and, crimsoned by pretended rage and simulated shame, exposed to the young man the ineffaceable mark which dishonored that beautiful shoulder.

"But," exclaimed Felton, "it is a fleur-de-lis that I behold!"

"And in that consists the greater infamy," replied Her Ladyship. "The brand of England would have made it necessary for him to prove from what court the sentence had been issued and I should have made public reference to all the tribunals of the realm; but the brand of France—oh, by that I was indeed branded!"

It was more than Felton could endure. Pale, motionless, petrified by this frightful revelation, dazzled by the superhuman loveliness of that woman, who unveiled herself before him with an immodesty which appeared to him sublime, he fell upon his knees before her, as did the first Christians before those pure and holy martyrs whom the persecution of the emperors delivered, in the circus, to the sanguinary wantonness of the mob. The mark of infamy disappeared—the beauty alone remained.

"Forgive me, forgive me!" exclaimed Felton; "oh, forgive me!"

Her Ladyship read in his eyes, "Love! Love!"

"Forgive you—for what?" she inquired.

"Forgive me for joining myself with your oppressors."

Her Ladyship held out her hand.

"So beautiful, so young!" exclaimed Felton, covering that hand with kisses.

Her Ladyship cast upon him one of those glances which convert the slave into a monarch.

Felton, Puritan though he was, relinquished her hand to kiss her feet.

He no longer loved—he now adored her.

When this crisis had passed over—when Her Ladyship appeared to have resumed the calmness she had never lost:

"Ah!" said he, "I have now only one thing more to ask of you; it is the name of your true executioner, for in my opinion there was only one; the other was an instrument, nothing more."

"Brother!" exclaimed Her Ladyship, "can it be necessary for me now to tell his name? Have you not already guessed it?"

"What!" resumed Felton, "he! again he! What! the true criminal?"

"The true criminal," said Her Ladyship, "is the plunderer of England, the persecutor of all true believers, the cowardly destroyer of woman's honor—he who, for a caprice of his polluted heart, is about to shed so much of England's blood; who protects the Protestants to-day and to-morrow will betray them!"

"Buckingham! It is indeed Buckingham!" exclaimed the exasperated Felton.

Her Ladyship hid her face in her hands, as if she was unable to endure the shame which that name recalled.

"Buckingham! the executioner of this angelic creature!" exclaimed Felton. "And Thou, oh, God, hast not smitten him! Thou hast left him noble, honored, powerful, for the destruction of us all!"

"God abandons him who ceases to be constant to himself," said Her Ladyship.

"But surely he must wish to draw down upon himself the chastisement reserved for the accursed!" continued Felton, with increasing excitement. "Surely he must wish that human vengeance should anticipate the chastisement of Heaven!"

"But men fear and spare him!"

"Oh!" exclaimed Felton, "I fear him not, neither will I spare him!"

Her Ladyship felt her heart bathed in a flood of infernal joy.

"But how," continued Felton, "does Lord de Winter, my protector, my father, come to be concerned in this?"

"Listen, Felton," replied Her Ladyship. "By the side of the cowardly and contemptible there are always men of noble, generous natures. I was betrothed to a man whom I loved and who loved me; a heart like yours, Felton, a man like you. I went to him and told him what had taken place. He knew me well and did not entertain a moment's doubt. He was a nobleman—a man equal in every respect to Buckingham. He spoke not, but he girded on his sword, wrapped his cloak around him and proceeded to the palace of the duke."

"Yes, yes," said Felton, "I understand; yet, with such men, it is not the sword that should be used, but the dagger."

"Buckingham had departed on the previous evening as ambassador to the court of Spain, where he went to demand the hand of the Infanta for King Charles I., then the Prince of Wales. My lover returned.

"'Listen,' said he; 'this man is gone and therefore for the present he escapes my vengeance. But in the meantime let us be united as we ought to be; and then depend on Lord de Winter to support his own honor and that of his wife.'"

"Lord de Winter!" exclaimed Felton.

"Yes," said Her Ladyship, "Lord de Winter. And

now you understand it all, do you not? Buckingham remained absent nearly a year; eight days before his return Lord de Winter died suddenly, leaving me his sole heiress. Whence came this blow? God, who sees everything, doubtless knows; as for me, I accuse nobody."

"Oh, what an abyss! what an abyss!" exclaimed Felton.

"Lord de Winter had died without confiding in his brother. The terrible secret was to have been concealed from every one until it burst like thunder on the guilty duke. Your protector had seen with pain this marriage of his brother with a young and portionless girl, and I perceived that I could expect no assistance from a man who was disappointed in his hopes of an inheritance. I went to France, resolved to remain there for the remainder of my life. But my whole fortune was in England, and all communications being stopped by the war, I was in want of everything and was, in fact, compelled to return. Six days ago I arrived at Portsmouth."

"Well?" said Felton.

"Well! Buckingham had unquestionably been apprised of my return and announced it to Lord de Winter, who was already prejudiced against me, and at the same time persuaded him that his sister-in-law was a dissolute and branded woman. The pure and noble voice of my husband was no longer there to defend me. Lord de Winter no doubt believed all that he heard, and the more readily because it was his interest to believe it. Hence he caused me to be arrested, conveyed here and placed under your charge. You know the sequel. The day after to-morrow he banishes, he transports me; the day after to-morrow he sends me forth amongst the infamous. Oh! the woof is well woven, the plot is skillfully planned, and my honor will perish in it. You see, Felton, why I must die! Felton, give me the knife!"

At these words, as if all her strength were exhausted,

Her Ladyship sank, weak and languishing, into the arms of the young officer, who, intoxicated with love, anger and unknown transports, received her with joy, eagerly pressing his lips to that beautiful mouth and feeling her heart beat against his own.

"No, no!" said he; "no, you shall live—you shall live honored and pure—you shall live to triumph over your enemies!"

Her Ladyship gently forced him back with her hand whilst she attracted him by her look.

"Oh, death! death!" said she, lowering her eyelids and her voice; "death rather than disgrace, Felton, my brother, my friend, I beseech you!"

"No!" exclaimed Felton, "no! you shall live and you shall be avenged."

"Felton, I bring misfortune upon everything that surrounds me! Felton, desert me, let me die!"

"Well, then, let us die together!" exclaimed he.

Several knocks sounded on the door.

"Listen!" said she; "we have been overheard. They come and it is ended. We are undone!"

"No," said Felton, "it is the sentinel, who merely lets me know that the guard is about to be relieved."

"Hasten then to the door and open it yourself."

Felton obeyed her. This woman already wholly enrossed his thoughts—she was already mistress of his soul.

On opening the door he found himself confronted by a sergeant who commanded a patrol of the guard.

"Well, what is the matter?" demanded the young lieutenant.

"You told me," replied the sentinel, "to open the door if I heard you call for help, but you forgot to leave me the key. I heard you cry out without understanding what you said; I tried to open the door, but it was fastened inside, and therefore I called the sergeant."

"And here I am," said the sergeant.

Felton—wandering, wild, verging on madness—remained speechless.

Her Ladyship saw at once that she must release him from his embarrassment. She ran to the table and seized the knife which he had placed there.

"And by what right would you prevent my death?" said she.

"Great God!" exclaimed Felton, as he saw the knife glittering in her hand.

At this moment a burst of ironical laughter resounded in the corridor.

The baron, attracted by the noise, stood in his dressing-gown and with his sword under his arm, upon the threshold of the door.

"Ah, ah!" said he, "here we are at the last act of the tragedy. You see, Felton, the drama has presented all the phases that I indicated. But don't concern yourself—no blood will be spilled."

Her Ladyship felt that she was ruined, unless she could give Felton an immediate and terrible proof of her courage.

"You deceive yourself, my lord! Blood will be spilled, and may that blood fall back on those who caused it to flow!"

Felton uttered a cry and rushed toward her, but he was too late—she had dealt the blow.

The knife had, fortunately—we ought to say skillfully—encountered the steel busk, which defended like a cuirass the chests of women at that period, and glancing aside, had torn the robe and penetrated transversely between the flesh and the ribs. The lady's dress was, nevertheless, instantaneously stained with blood, and she fell back, apparently insensible.

Felton snatched away the knife.

"See, my lord," said he, with a gloomy look; "this woman, who was under my guard, has slain herself!"

"Make yourself easy, Felton," replied Lord de Winter; "she is not dead; demons do not die so easily. Make yourself easy and go and wait for me in my apartment."

"But, my lord——"

"Go, I command you!"

At this injunction from his superior, Felton obeyed; ut as he went out he placed the knife in his bosom.

As for Lord de Winter, he contented himself with ummoning the woman who waited upon Her Ladyship. nd when she came, having recommended to her care he prisoner, who was still insensible, he left them to- ether.

Nevertheless, as the wound might, after all, in spite f his suspicions, be serious, he immediately dispatched man on horseback for a surgeon.

CHAPTER LVIII.

THE ESCAPE.

s Lord de Winter had suspected, Her Ladyship was ot very dangerously wounded. As soon, therefore, as he found herself alone with the attendant for whom he baron had sent, and who hastened to undress her, he opened her eyes. It was, however, necessary to ounterfeit weakness and pain, and to an actress like Her Ladyship this was no difficult matter. So com- letely, indeed, was this poor woman the dupe of her risoner, that in spite of the latter's entreaties she per- isted in watching over her throughout the night.

But the presence of this woman was no impediment o Her Ladyship's thoughts. There could be no longer ny doubt that Felton was convinced, that Felton was ers; and that had an angel appeared to the young an to accuse her, he would certainly have taken it, n his present state of mind, for an emissary of the Evil)ne. Her Ladyship smiled at this idea, for Felton was enceforth her only hope, her sole means of safety.

Yet Lord de Winter might have suspected him, and elton himself might now, perhaps, be watched.

About four o'clock in the morning the surgeon arrived, ut Her Ladyship's wound had already closed. The urgeon, therefore, could determine neither its direction

nor its depth, but from the pulse of his patient he concluded that the case was not very serious.

In the morning, under pretence that she had not slept during the night, and needed rest, Her Ladyship dismissed the woman who had watched beside the bed. She entertained a hope that Felton would visit her at breakfast time, but Felton came not. Had her secret fears been realized? Had Felton been suspected by the baron, and would he fail her now, at the decisive moment? She had only one remaining day. Lord de Winter had fixed her departure for the twenty-third and this was the morning of the twenty-second. Nevertheless, she still waited in tolerable patience till the hour of dinner.

Although she had eaten nothing in the morning, her dinner was brought to her at the usual time, and Her Ladyship then perceived with alarm that the uniform of the soldier who guarded her was changed.

She hazarded a question as to what had become of Felton. The answer was that Felton had departed on horseback an hour before. She inquired whether the baron was still in the castle, and the soldier replied that he was and had given orders to be called if the prisoner should express a wish to speak to him.

Her Ladyship said she was too weak at present and that her only wish was to remain alone.

The soldier then quitted the room, leaving the dinner on the table.

Felton had been sent away and the marines who guarded her were changed. It was obvious, therefore, that Felton was distrusted. This was the last blow inflicted on the prisoner.

As soon as she was left alone, Her Ladyship arose. That bed to which she had confined herself in order that her wound might be thought serious, scorched her like a burning furnace.

She cast a glance at the door; a board had been nailed over the wicket. The baron, no doubt, feared that she might through this opening still find some diabolical

means of seducing her guards. Her Ladyship smiled with joy. She could now give way to her emotions without observation. She roamed about her chamber with all the violence of a raging lunatic or of a tigress imprisoned in her iron cage. Had the knife still been there, she would certainly have resolved to kill, not herself, but the baron.

At six o'clock Lord de Winter entered. He was armed to the very teeth. This man, in whom Her Ladyship had seen only a rather insignificant gentleman, had now become an inexorable jailer. He seemed to foresee everything, to conjecture everything, to anticipate everything. A single glance at Her Ladyship told him what was passing in her soul.

"So," said he, "you will not kill me to-day, for you are without a weapon, and, moreover, I am on my guard. You had begun to corrupt my poor Felton; he has already felt your infernal influence, but I wish to save him and you shall see him no more. It is all ended now; you may collect your clothes, for to-morrow you will set out. I had fixed the embarkation for the twenty-fourth, but I have reflected that the sooner it takes place the surer it will be. By twelve o'clock to-morrow I shall receive the order for your banishment, signed by Buckingham. If you say one single word to any one whatever before you are on board the vessel, my sergeant will blow out your brains; he has received his orders so to do. If, when on board, you speak to any one without the captain's permission, the captain will have you cast into the sea. This is all settled. And now, farewell till our next meeting; I have nothing more to say to you to-day. I shall see you again to-morrow, to take leave of you."

At these words the baron left the room.

Her Ladyship had listened to this threatening tirade with a smile of scorn upon her lips, but with fury in her heart.

The supper was brought in. Her Ladyship felt that she needed strength, for she knew not what might be

the events of that night, which was now approaching in gloom. Huge clouds were already sweeping across the skies and distant flashes announced a tempest. About ten o'clock the storm burst forth, and Her Ladyship found some consolation in seeing nature partake of the commotion in her own breast. The thunder roared like the angry passions in her soul; and it seemed to her as if the passing gusts disturbed her brow as they did the trees whose branches they bent down, and whose leaves they swept off. She howled like the tempest, but her voice was unheard in the vast voice of nature, which also seemed to be moaning in despair.

Suddenly she heard something strike against the window, and by the light of the gleaming flash she saw the countenance of a man appear behind its bars. She ran to the window and opened it.

"Felton!" she exclaimed; "I am saved!"

"Yes," said Felton, "but silence! silence! I must have time to saw your bars, only be careful that we are not seen through the wicket."

"Oh! it is a token that the Lord is on our side, Felton," replied Her Ladyship; "they have closed up the wicket with a board."

"Good!" said Felton. "Our God has deprived them of their senses."

"But what must I do?" inquired Her Ladyship.

"Nothing! nothing! only shut your window. Go to bed, or, at any rate, lie down with your clothes on; and when I have finished I shall tap on the glass. But will you be able to accompany me?"

"Oh, yes!"

"But your wound?"

"Pains me, but does not prevent me walking."

"Be ready, then, at the first signal."

Her Ladyship closed the window, put out her lamp, as Felton had advised, and threw herself upon the bed. Amidst the raging of the storm she heard the grating of the file against the bars and by the light of every flash she beheld the form of Felton behind the glass.

She passed an hour in almost breathless suspense; icy drops stood upon her brow, and at every sound that issued from the corridor her heart was convulsed with frightful agony. There are hours which seem prolonged into years. At the expiration of this time, Felton again tapped. Her Ladyship bounded from her bed and opened the window; the removal of two bars had formed an opening large enough to admit a man.

"Are you ready?" demanded Felton.

"Yes. Must I carry anything away with me?"

"Gold, if you have any."

"Fortunately they have left me what I had."

"So much the better, for I have used all mine in chartering a vessel."

"Here!" said Her Ladyship, placing in Felton's hand a bag of gold.

Felton took the bag and threw it to the foot of the wall.

"Now," said he, "will you come?"

"Here I am."

Her Ladyship mounted on a chair and passed the upper part of her body through the window. She saw the young officer suspended over the abyss by a ladder of ropes. For the first time a sentiment of fear reminded her that she was a woman. The void terrified her.

"I was afraid it would be so," said Felton.

"It is nothing! it is nothing!" exclaimed Her Ladyship. "I will descend with my eyes shut."

"Have you confidence in me?"

"Need you ask me?"

"Then put your two hands together, and cross them. That's right."

Felton fastened her two wrists together with his handkerchief and then bound a cord about them.

"What are you doing?" demanded Her Ladyship, in surprise.

"Place your arms around my neck and do not be afraid."

"But I shall make you lose your balance and we shall both be dashed to pieces."

"Do not be alarmed; I am a sailor."

There was not a moment to be lost. Her Ladyship passed her arms around Felton's neck and allowed herself to glide through the window.

Felton began to descend the ladder slowly, step by step. In spite of the weight of the two bodies, the blast of the hurricane rocked them in the air. Suddenly Felton paused.

"What is the matter?" demanded Her Ladyship.

"Silence!" said Felton; "I hear footsteps."

"We are discovered!"

There was silence for a few moments.

"No," said Felton, "it is nothing."

"But what is that noise?"

"It is the patrol, who are about to pass on their round."

"And where do they pass?"

"Immediately beneath us."

"Then we shall be discovered."

"No, if there should be no lightning."

"They will strike against the bottom of the ladder."

"Fortunately it is too short by six feet."

"There they are! My God!"

"Silence!"

They both remained suspended—motionless, scarcely venturing to breathe, at a height of twenty feet above the ground, whilst the soldiers passed laughing and talking beneath them. It was a fearful moment for the fugitives! The patrol passed by. They heard the sound of their retreating steps and the murmur of their voices, which gradually became weaker in the distance.

"Now," said Felton, "we are saved!"

Her Ladyship breathed a sigh, and fainted.

Felton continued to descend. Having reached the bottom of the ladder and finding no further support for his feet, he now descended with his hands, until he clung to the last step, when, hanging by the strength of his

rists, he found that his feet touched the ground. He cked up the bag of gold, which he took between his eth, and raising Her Ladyship in his arms, retreated pidly in a direction opposite to that which the patrol ıd taken. Leaving the line of the guard he plunged wn amidst the rocks, and when he had reached the a-shore he whistled. His signal was answered in a milar manner, and five minutes afterward a boat peared, manned by four men.

The boat came near, but the water was too shallow r it to reach the shore. Felton waded into the sea to his waist, not wishing to intrust his precious ırden to any other hands. Fortunately the tempest as beginning to abate, although the sea was still rough. he little boat bounded on the waves like a nutshell.

"To the sloop!" said Felton, "and pull quickly."

The four men bent themselves to their work, but the a was too heavy for their oars to make much head-ay. Nevertheless, they began to leave the castle hind them, and that was the principal aim. The ght was profoundly dark and it was almost impossible r them to perceive the shore; much less would any e upon the shore be able to perceive their boat. A ack speck was rocking on the sea; it was the sloop.

Whilst the boat was advancing toward it with all the rength of its four oarsmen, Felton unbound the cord ıd the handkerchief which confined Her Ladyship's nds. Then, when her hands were once more free, took some sea water and sprinkled it upon her face. er Ladyship heaved a sigh and opened her eyes.

"Where am I?" said she.

"Saved," replied the young officer.

"Oh! saved! saved!" exclaimed she. "Yes, I see e heavens and the ocean. This air which I breathe that of liberty! Ah! Thanks, Felton, thanks!"

The young man pressed her to his heart.

"But what is the matter with my hands?" asked er Ladyship; "my wrists feel as though they had en crushed in a vise."

She lifted up her arms; her wrists were indeed bruised.

"Alas!" said Felton, looking at those beautiful hands, with a melancholy shake of the head.

"Oh! it is nothing, it is nothing!" exclaimed Her Ladyship. "I remember now."

Her Ladyship looked around her.

"It is there," said Felton, pointing to the bag of gold.

They neared the sloop. The seamen on watch hailed the boat, from which an answer was returned.

"What vessel is this?" demanded Her Ladyship.

"The one I have chartered for you."

"And whither will it take me?"

"Wheresoever you please, after you have landed me at Portsmouth."

"What have you to do at Portsmouth?" demanded Her Ladyship.

"To execute the orders of Lord de Winter," said Felton, with a gloomy smile.

"What orders?" inquired Her Ladyship.

"Do you not understand, then?" replied Felton.

"No; explain yourself, I beseech you."

"As he distrusted me, he determined to guard you himself and sent me in his stead to procure Buckingham's signature to the order for your transportation."

"But, if he suspected you, how came he to intrust you with this order?"

"He supposed me ignorant of its purport, as he had told me nothing respecting it. I had, however, received my information from you."

"True. And you are going to Portsmouth?"

"I have no time to lose; to-morrow is the twenty-third, and Buckingham departs to-morrow with the fleet."

"Departs to-morrow! Where is he going?"

"To La Rochelle?"

"He must not go!" exclaimed Her Ladyship, forgetting her habitual presence of mind.

"You may rest easy," replied Felton, "he will not go!"

Her Ladyship trembled with delight. She had just

penetrated the most secret depths of the young man's heart and had there seen the death of Buckingham ineffaceably registered.

"Felton," whispered she, "you are as great as Judas Maccabeus. Should you die, I die with you! I can say no more."

"Hush!" said Felton, "we have reached the vessel."

They were, in fact, beside the sloop. Felton ascended the ladder and gave his hand to Her Ladyship, whilst the sailors supported her, for the sea was still agitated. In a moment afterward they were upon the deck.

"Captain," said Felton, "here is the lady of whom I spoke to you. You must take her, safe and sound, to France."

"For a thousand pistoles," replied the captain.

"I have already paid you five hundred."

"True," said the captain.

"And here are the other five hundred," added Her Ladyship, putting her hand to the bag of gold.

"No," said the captain, "I have but one word and that I gave to this young man. The other five hundred pistoles are not my due until we reach Boulogne."

"And shall we reach there?"

"Safe and sound," replied the captain, "as sure as my name is Jack Butler."

"Well!" said Her Ladyship, "if you keep your word, instead of five hundred, I will give you a thousand pistoles."

"Hurrah for you, then, my lovely lady!" exclaimed the captain; "and may fortune often send me such passengers as your ladyship."

"In the meantime," said Felton, "run into Chichester Bay, near Portsmouth. You remember that it was agreed you should take us there?"

The captain replied by issuing orders for the necessary evolutions, and toward seven o'clock in the morning the little vessel came to in the appointed bay.

During the passage Felton related everything to Her Ladyship; how, instead of going to London, he had

chartered this little vessel; how he had returned; how he had scaled the wall by placing in the interstices of the stones, as he went up, cramp irons to support his feet; and how at last, having reached the bars of her window, he had secured the ladder to them. Her Ladyship knew the rest.

On her side Her Ladyship endeavored to encourage Felton in his design, but at the first word she uttered she clearly perceived that it was necessary rather to moderate than to excite the young fanatic.

It was agreed that Her Ladyship should wait for Felton until ten o'clock, and if he had not returned by that hour she was to set out.

In the latter case, and supposing him to be afterward at liberty, he was to join her in France, at the Carmelite Convent of Bethune.

CHAPTER LIX.

WHAT HAPPENED AT PORTSMOUTH ON THE TWENTY-THIRD OF AUGUST, 1628.

FELTON took leave of Milady as a brother who is going out for a simple walk takes leave of his sister, by kissing her hand. His whole manner and appearance indicated a state of ordinary tranquillity, except that a strange gleam, like the brilliancy of fever, beamed from his eyes. His forehead was even paler than usual, his teeth firmly closed, and his speech had a short and abrupt tone which seemed to denote that his thoughts were intent upon some gloomy purpose.

As long as he remained in the boat which took him on shore he kept his face turned toward Her Ladyship, who, standing on the deck, followed him with her eyes. Neither of them now entertained much fear of being pursued. Her Ladyship's apartment was never entered before nine o'clock in the morning, and it took some hours to travel from the castle to London.

Felton set foot on land, climbed the rising ground which led to the top of the cliff, saluted Her Ladyship for the last time, and took his way toward the town. After a hundred steps, as the path turned downwards, he could no longer see more than the mast of the vessel.

He hastened as fast as possible in the direction of Portsmouth, whose towers and houses could be seen about half a mile off through the morning mist. Beyond the town the sea was covered with innumerable ships, whose masts, like a forest of poplars stripped of their leaves by winter, bent before the breath of the wind.

During this rapid walk Felton reviewed in his mind all the accusations, whether true or false, with which two years of ascetic meditation and long intercourse with the Puritans had furnished him against the royal favorite. When he compared the public crimes of this minister—crimes which were notorious and, in a manner, European—with those private and unknown ones of which Her Ladyship had accused him, Felton found that the most guilty of the two beings whom Buckingham united in himself was the one whose life was hidden from the world. His own love, so singular, fresh and ardent, made him see the infamous and imaginary accusation of Her Ladyship, as one sees through a microscope the atoms of an insect, otherwise imperceptible, attaining the proportions of a frightful monster. The rapidity of his progress also inflamed his blood. The idea that he left behind him, exposed to a dreadful vengeance, the woman whom he loved, or, rather, adored as a saint—his past emotions, and his present fatigue—all tended to excite and elevate his soul above the feelings of humanity.

On entering Portsmouth at about eight o'clock in the morning, he found the whole population in motion. The drums were beating in the streets and in the harbor, and the troops about to be embarked were descending toward the sea. Felton arrived at the Admiralty House, covered with dust and wet with perspiration. His usually pale face was purple with heat and anger. The sentinel

wished to repulse him, but Felton called for the officer on guard and drew from his pocket the letter which he carried.

"An express from Lord de Winter," said he.

At the name of Lord de Winter, who was known to be one of Buckingham's most intimate friends, the officer gave an order for the admission of Felton, who, moreover, himself wore the uniform of a naval officer.

Felton rushed into the house, but the moment he reached the hall another man also entered, covered with dust and out of breath, having left at the door a post-horse, which on reaching there had fallen on its knees. Both individuals addressed Patrick, the duke's confidential valet, at the same moment. Felton named the Baron de Winter. The stranger refused to mention any name and declared that he could make himself known to no one but the duke. Each insisted on being admitted before the other. Patrick, who knew that Lord de Winter was connected, both by business and friendship, with his grace, gave the preference to him who came in his name. The other was obliged to wait, and it was easy enough to see how heartily he cursed the delay.

The valet conducted Felton through a large room, in which were waiting the deputies from La Rochelle, led by the Prince de Soubise, and introduced him into a cabinet, where Buckingham, having just left the bath, was finishing his toilet, to which now, as ever, he gave much attention.

"Lieutenant Felton," said Patrick, "from Lord de Winter."

"From Lord de Winter?" repeated Buckingham. "Show him in."

Felton entered. At this moment Buckingham threw upon a sofa a rich dressing-gown, brocaded with gold, and put on a doublet of blue velvet, entirely embroidered with pearls.

"Why did not the baron come himself?" demanded Buckingham. "I expected him this morning."

"He desired me to inform your grace," said Felton, "that he very much regretted not having that honor, but that he was prevented by the watch which he is obliged to keep at the castle."

"Yes, yes," said Buckingham; "I know that; he has a lady prisoner there."

"It is, in fact, about that prisoner that I wish to speak to your grace," replied Felton.

"Well, proceed."

"What I have to say to you, my lord, must be heard by yourself alone."

"Leave us, Patrick," said Buckingham, "but keep within hearing; I shall call you presently."

Patrick left the room.

"We are alone, sir," said Buckingham. "Speak."

"My lord," replied Felton, "the Baron de Winter lately wrote to your grace requesting you to sign an order for the transportation of a young woman, named Charlotte Backson."

"Yes, sir; and I replied, that he should either bring or send me the order and I would sign it."

"Here it is, my lord."

"Give it me," said the duke.

Taking the paper from Felton's hands, his grace cast a rapid glance over its contents. Then, perceiving it was really that which had been referred to, he laid it on the table, took a pen and prepared to sign it.

"Pardon me, my lord," said Felton, interrupting the duke, "but is your grace aware that Charlotte Backson is not the real name of this young woman?"

"Yes, sir, I know it," replied the duke, dipping his pen into the ink.

"Then your grace is acquainted with her real name?" demanded Felton, in an abrupt tone.

"I do know it."

The duke put the pen to the paper. Felton became pale.

"And knowing this true name," resumed Felton, "will your grace still sign the paper?"

"Certainly," said Buckingham, "and rather twice than once."

"I cannot believe," continued Felton, in a voice which became more and more abrupt and reproachful, "that your grace is aware that this refers to Lady de Winter."

"I am perfectly aware of it, although I am astonished that it should be known to you."

"And your grace will sign this order without remorse?"

Buckingham looked haughtily at the speaker.

"Do you happen to know, sir," said he, "that you are asking me some strange questions, and that I am very foolish to answer them?"

"Answer them, my lord!" said Felton; "your position is perhaps more serious than you suppose."

Buckingham thought that as the young man came from Lord de Winter he probably spoke in his name; he therefore restrained himself.

"Without any remorse whatever," said he; "and the baron knows as well as I do that Her Ladyship is a great criminal, to whom it is almost a favor to limit her punishment to transportation."

The duke again put his pen to the paper.

"You shall not sign that order, my lord," said Felton, making a step toward the duke.

"I shall not sign this order?" exclaimed Buckingham; "and why not?"

"Because you will consult your own conscience and will render justice to the lady."

"It would be nothing more than justice if she were sent to Tyburn," said the duke; "Her Ladyship is an infamous creature."

"My lord, Her Ladyship is an angel! You know it well, and I demand her liberty."

"Ah!" said Buckingham, "are you mad, thus to speak to me?"

"Excuse me, my lord; I speak as I can—I restrain myself. Yet, my lord, think of what you are about to do; beware lest you should overfill the measure——"

"What does he mean? God forgive me," exclaimed Buckingham, "I verily believe he threatens me!"

"No, my lord! I implore you still, and I warn you—one drop of water is sufficient to make a full vase overflow—a slight fault is sufficient to draw down vengeance upon the head which has been spared to this day, in spite of so many crimes."

"Mr. Felton," said Buckingham, "you will leave this room and immediately place yourself under arrest."

"And you, my lord, will hear me to the end. You have seduced this young girl, you have outraged and polluted her. Repair your crimes toward her, let her depart freely, and I will exact nothing more of you."

"You will *exact* nothing more!" cried Buckingham, looking at Felton with astonishment and dwelling on each syllable of the words which he had just pronounced.

"My lord," continued Felton, becoming more excited as he spoke, "my lord, be careful; the whole of England is wearied by your iniquities; my lord, you have abused the royal power, which you have almost usurped; my lord, you are an abomination to God and man. God will punish you hereafter and I will punish you now."

"Ah! This is rather too much!" exclaimed Buckingham, making a step toward the door.

Felton barred the way.

"I humbly entreat you," said he, "to sign an order for the liberation of Lady de Winter. Reflect that she is the woman whom you have dishonored."

"Leave the room, sir!" said Buckingham, "or I will call my servants to expel you!"

"You will not call them," replied Felton, throwing himself between the duke and the bell, which was placed upon a stand inlaid with silver; "take care, my lord, for you are now in God's hands!"

"In the devil's hands, you mean!" exclaimed Buckingham, elevating his voice so as to attract the attention of those without, but not exactly calling them.

"Sign, my lord—sign the liberation of Lady de Winter!" said Felton, pushing a paper toward the duke.

"By force? You are making a fool of yourself! Halloo, there! Patrick!"

"Sign, my lord!"

"Never!"

"Never?"

"Help!" cried the duke, at the same time leaping toward his sword.

But Felton did not give him time to draw it; the open knife with which Her Ladyship had wounded herself was concealed under his doublet, and in one bound he was upon the duke.

At that moment Patrick entered the room, exclaiming:

"My lord, a letter from France."

"From France!" cried Buckingham, forgetting everything as he imagined from whom that letter came.

Felton took advantage of the moment and buried the knife up to its handle in his side.

"Ah, traitor!" exclaimed Buckingham, "thou hast slain me!"

"Murder!" shouted Patrick.

Felton cast his eyes around, and seeing the door free, he rushed into the adjoining room, in which, as we have said, the deputies from La Rochelle were waiting, passed through it, still running, and hurried toward the staircase. But upon the first step he met Lord de Winter, who, on seeing him wild looking, livid, and with bloodstains upon the hands and face, rushed upon him and exclaimed:

"I knew it! I foresaw it! One minute too late. Alas, alas! unfortunate that I am!"

Felton did not attempt to resist and Lord de Winter handed him over to the guards, who, in the meantime, conducted him to a little terrace overlooking the sea. His lordship himself hastened into Buckingham's cabinet.

On hearing the duke's cry, and Patrick's shout, the man whom Felton had met in the ante-chamber rushed into his grace's room. He found the duke reclining upon a sofa, pressing the wound with his convulsive hand.

"Laporte," said the duke, in a dying voice, "Laporte, do you come from her?"

"Yes, your grace," replied the faithful servant of Anne of Austria, "but I fear I come too late."

"Hush, Laporte! you might be overheard. Patrick, let no one enter. Oh, I shall not know what she says to me! My God! I am dying!"

The duke fainted.

"Nevertheless, Lord de Winter, the deputies, the chiefs of the expedition, and the officers of Buckingham's household had already forced their way into the room. The tidings, which had filled the house with lamentations and groans, soon spread and became generally known throughout the town; whilst the firing of a cannon announced that something new and unexpected had occurred.

Lord de Winter tore his hair. "One minute too late!" exclaimed he. "One minute too late! Oh, my God! my God! what a misfortune!"

He had, in fact, at seven o'clock in the morning received information that a rope-ladder had been found suspended from one of the windows of the castle, and instantly hastening to Her Ladyship's chamber, he had found it empty, the window open, and the bars filed through. Remembering, then, the verbal warning which D'Artagnan had sent to him through his messenger, he had trembled for the duke; and without a moment's delay he had mounted the first horse he found and galloped at full speed to Portsmouth, dismounted in the courtyard and hastily ascended the staircase, where, as we have already said, he encountered Felton on the topmost step.

But the duke was not yet dead. He recovered his senses, again unclosed his eyes, and hope revisited all their hearts.

"Gentlemen," said he, "leave me alone with Patrick and Laporte. Ah, is it you, De Winter? You sent me a strange madman this morning. See the state in which he has placed me!"

"Oh, my lord!" exclaimed the baron, "oh, my lord, never shall I forgive myself for it!"

"And there you would be wrong, De Winter," said Buckingham, giving him his hand. "I know not of any man who is worthy to be regretted by another throughout the whole of his life. But leave us, I beseech you!"

The baron left the room, sobbing.

There remained in the cabinet only the wounded duke, Laporte and Patrick. A surgeon had been sent for, but could not be found.

"You will live, my lord! you will live!" repeated the messenger of Anne of Austria, who was kneeling before the duke's sofa.

"What has she written to me?" said Buckingham, feebly, as the blood gushed from him, and he subdued, in order to speak of her he loved, his enormous pains; "what has she written to me? Read me her letter."

"Oh, my lord!" exclaimed Laporte.

"Well, Laporte, do you not see that I have no time to lose?"

Laporte instantly broke the seal and placed the parchment before the duke's eyes; but Buckingham in vain attempted to decipher the writing.

"Read it, then," said he; "read it—read quickly, for I can no longer see! Read it, for I shall soon be no longer able to hear, and shall die without knowing what she has written to me."

Laporte no longer hesitated. The letter was as follows:

"My Lord,—By all that I have suffered through you and for you since I have known you, I conjure you, if you have any regard for my peace, to put an end to those vast preparations which you are making against France, and to cease a war, of which it is said, religion is the avowed, and your love for me the secret cause. That war may not only bring great calamities to France and England, but even upon yourself, my lord—misfortunes for which I could never be consoled. Be watch-

over your own life, which is threatened, and which vill be dear to me from the moment when I shall not be bliged to consider you as an enemy.

" Yours affectionately, ANNE."

Buckingham roused all his fast failing energies to listen o this letter, and when it was ended, as if he had experienced a bitter disappointment :

" And have you nothing more to tell me—no verbal nessage, Laporte ? " demanded he.

" Yes, my lord ; the queen charged me to tell you to e upon your guard, for she had been warned that you vere to be assassinated ! "

" And is that all—is that all ? " resumed Buckingham, mpatiently.

" She also bade me tell you that she still loved you."

" Ah ! " said Buckingham. " God be praised ! My leath, then, will not be to her as the death of a stranger ! "

" Patrick," continued the duke, " bring me the casket vhich contained the diamond studs."

Patrick brought the object he demanded, which Laorte recognized as having belonged to the queen.

" Now the white satin bag on which her initials are mbroidered in pearls."

Patrick again obeyed.

" Here, Laporte," said Buckingham, " here are the nly tokens which I have received from her—this silver asket and these two letters. You will restore them to er majesty ; and, for a last memorial "—he looked round him for some precious object—" you will join vith them——"

He still strove to find some gift ; but his eyes, dimmed y death, encountered nothing but the knife which had allen from Felton's hand, with the crimson blood still eeking on its blade.

" And you will join with them this knife," said the luke, pressing Laporte's hand.

He was still able to place the satin bag in the casket nd to drop the knife upon it, as he made a sign to

Laporte that he could no longer speak. Then, in a la convulsion, against which he was no longer able to co tend, he glided from the sofa to the floor.

Patrick uttered a loud cry.

Buckingham endeavored to smile once more, b death arrested the thought, which remained engrav on his forehead and lips like a last farewell of love.

At this moment the duke's surgeon arrived, complete bewildered. He had already repaired on board the a miral's ship, from whence he had been so hastily sun moned. He approached the duke, took his hand, whic he held for a moment in his own and then let it fall agai

"It is all in vain," said he, "he is dead!"

"Dead! dead!" exclaimed Patrick.

At this cry the whole crowd re-entered the apartmer and there was nothing to be seen but consternation an confusion.

As soon as Lord de Winter knew that Buckingham ha expired, he ran to Felton, whom the soldiers still guarde on the terrace.

"Wretch!" said he to the young man, who, sinc Buckingham's death, had recovered that tranquillity an coolness which were never more to abandon him, "wretch what have you done?"

"I have avenged myself!" he replied.

"Yourself!" cried the baron: "say, rather, that yo have been the instrument of that cursed woman; bu I swear to you that it shall be her last crime."

"I do not know what you mean," replied Felton calmly, "and I am quite ignorant of what woma you are speaking, my lord. I have killed the Duke o Buckingham, because he twice refused to make me a captain at your request. I have punished him for his injustice—nothing more."

De Winter looked, in his astonishment, at the men who were binding Felton, and knew not what to think of such insensibility.

One single idea, however, still left a cloud upon Felton's brow. At every step that he heard, the simple Puritan

thought he recognized the step and voice of Her Ladyship, who had come to throw herself into his arms, and to accuse herself and perish with him.

Suddenly he started. His glance was fixed upon a point in the sea which the terrace where he stood completely overlooked. With the eagle eye of a sailor he had discovered there, where another could only have seen a seagull balancing itself above the waves, the sail of a sloop which was bearing on toward the shores of France. He grew pale, pressed his hand upon his heart, which was breaking, and at once comprehended the whole extent of the treachery.

"Grant me one last favor," said he to the baron.

"What is it?" demanded the latter.

"What is the hour?"

The baron drew out his watch. "It wants ten minutes to nine," said he.

Her Ladyship had anticipated the time of her departure by an hour and a half. As soon as she heard the cannon which announced the fatal event, she had ordered the anchor to be weighed.

The boat was now visible under a blue sky, at a great distance from the shore.

"It was God's will!" said Felton, with the resignation of a fanatic, but still unable to tear his eyes from that bark, on board of which he doubtless believed that he could distinguish the fair vision of her for whom he was about to sacrifice his life.

De Winter followed his glances, scrutinized his emotions, and comprehended all that had occurred.

"Be punished *alone* first, wretch!" said his lordship to Felton, who allowed himself to be dragged away, with his eyes still turned toward the sea; "but I swear to you, by the memory of my brother, whom I so truly loved, that your accomplice is not saved."

Felton held down his head without uttering a word.

As for De Winter, he hastily descended the stairs and betook himself to the harbor.

CHAPTER LX.

IN FRANCE.

The first apprehension of the King of England, Charles I on hearing of the Duke of Buckingham's death, was tha such fearful news might discourage the Rochellais : henc he endeavored, says Richelieu in his memoirs, to con ceal it from them as long as possible, closing all th ports of his kingdom, and being scrupulously carefu that no vessel should leave until after the departur of the army which Buckingham had been preparing and the embarkation of which he now undertook t superintend in person. He even enforced this orde with so much strictness as to detain in England th Danish ambassador, who had already taken leave, an the ambassador from Holland, who was to conduct t Flushing those Dutch Indiamen of which Charles ha procured the restitution.

But as the king had not thought of issuing this orde until five hours after the event, that is to say, at tw o'clock in the afternoon, two ships had already left the port, one bearing, as we know, Her Ladyship, who already suspecting what had happened, was confirmed in her belief by seeing the black flag unfolding itself from the mast of the admiral's ship.

As for the second vessel, we shall hereafter be told whom it carried and how it got away.

During the interval nothing extraordinary had occurred at the camp before La Rochelle, except that the king, who was weary as usual, and perhaps more so at the camp than elsewhere, resolved to go *incognito* to enjoy the *fêtes* of St. Louis at St. Germain, and requested the cardinal to provide for him an escort of twenty musketeers. The cardinal, who sometimes caught the weariness of the king, willingly gave this leave of absence to his royal lieutenant, who promised to return by the twelfth of September.

When M. de Treville was informed of this journey by his eminence, he prepared his baggage; and as, without knowing the cause, he was fully aware of the earnest desire, or rather the imperious necessity that the four friends had for visiting Paris, he marked them out as part of the escort. The four young men received the intelligence a quarter of an hour after M. de Treville and were the very first persons to whom he communicated it; and then it was that D'Artagnan fully appreciated the favor which the cardinal had conferred upon him in promoting him to the musketeers, as but for that circumstance he would have been compelled to remain at the camp, whilst his companions departed.

This anxiety to return to Paris was occasioned by the danger which Madame Bonancieux was likely to incur from meeting her mortal enemy, Lady de Winter, at the Convent of Bethune. Thus, as we have said, Aramis had written immediately to Marie Michon—that seamstress of Tours who had such exalted acquaintances—that she might solicit from the queen an order empowering Madame Bonancieux to leave the convent and take refuge in either Lorraine or Belgium. The answer was not long delayed, for in eight or ten days Aramis had received this letter:

"My Dear Cousin,—I send the order empowering our little servant to withdraw from the Convent of Bethune, the air of which you do not think beneficial to her. My sister sends you this order with great pleasure, for she is much attached to this little girl, whom she hopes to benefit in the end. I embrace you.

"Marie Michon."

To this letter was appended an order in these terms:

"The superior of the Convent of Bethune will deliver into the hands of the bearer of this note the novice who entered the convent under my recommendation and patronage. Anne.

"At the Louvre, August 10, 1628."

It may well be imagined how much this relationship between Aramis and a seamstress at Tours, who called the queen her sister, enlivened the young men; but Aramis, after having two or three times blushed up to the whites of his eyes at the coarse jokes of Porthos, had begged his friends not to mention the subject again, declaring that if another word was said about it he would not again employ his cousin as an agent in affairs of the kind.

So nothing more about Marie Michon was said between the four musketeers, who had, moreover, obtained what they wanted—the order to draw Madame Bonancieux from the Convent of Bethune. It is true that this order would be of no great advantage to them whilst they continued in the camp at La Rochelle—that is to say, at the other extremity of France. D'Artagnan was about to ask leave of absence of M. de Treville, confiding to him plainly how important it was that he should depart, when the intelligence was sent to him, as well as to his three companions, that the king was about to proceed to Paris with an escort of twenty musketeers, of which they were to form a part. Great was their joy. Their servants were sent forward with the baggage and they themselves set out on the sixteenth, in the morning.

The cardinal attended the king from Surgeres to Mauzé, where the king and his minister took leave of each other with great professions of friendship. Nevertheless, the king, although he traveled very fast, for he wished to reach Paris by the twenty-third, was so anxious for amusement that he halted from time to time, to hunt the magpie—a pastime for which he had acquired a taste from De Luynes, the first husband of Madame de Chevreuse, and for which he had preserved a great predilection. Sixteen of the twenty musketeers much enjoyed this sport when it occurred, but four of them cursed it most heartily. D'Artagnan more especially had a perpetual humming in his ears, which Porthos thus explained:

"A woman of the higher rank assured me that it is a sign that some one is talking about you somewhere."

On the night of the twenty-third the escort at length passed through Paris. The king thanked M. de Treville and allowed him to grant four days' leave of absence to his men, on condition that not one of the favored individuals should appear at any public place, under pain of the Bastile.

The first four leaves were granted, as may be imagined, to our four friends; and more than that, Athos persuaded M. de Treville to extend it to six days instead of four, and managed to put two more nights into these six days; for they set off on the twenty-fourth at five o'clock in the evening, and M. de Treville had the complaisance to post-date the leave on the morning of the twenty-fifth.

"Oh, good heavens!" said D'Artagnan, who, as we are well aware, never foresaw difficulty, "it appears to me that we are making a great disturbance about a very simple matter. In two days, by killing two or three horses, which I should not care about, for I have plenty of money, I could be at Bethune. I should then deliver the queen's letter to the abbess and could bring back the dear treasure which I am seeking—not to Lorraine, not to Belgium, but to Paris, where she might be securely concealed, particularly whilst the cardinal remains at La Rochelle.

"Then, when the campaign is once ended, partly through the protection of her cousin and partly through what we have ourselves personally done for her, we shall obtain from the queen whatever we desire. Remain, therefore, here; do not uselessly fatigue yourselves. I and Planchet will be quite sufficient for so simple an expedition."

To this, Athos quietly replied:

"And we, also, have got some money, for I have not quite yet drunk out the remains of the diamond, and Porthos and Aramis have not quite eaten it up. So we may as well founder four horses as one. But, remember, D'Artagnan," he added, in a voice so sad that his accent made the young man shudder, "remember

that Bethune is a town where the cardinal has made an appointment with a woman who, wherever she goes, brings misfortune with her. If you had only four men to deal with, D'Artagnan, I would let you go alone. But you have to deal with this woman, so let all four of us go; and God grant that, with our four valets, we may be in sufficient number."

"You quite terrify me, Athos!" exclaimed D'Artagnan; "what, then, do you dread?"

"Everything!" replied Athos.

D'Artagnan looked into the countenances of his companions, which, like that of Athos, bore the impress of profound anxiety; and they continued their journey at the utmost speed of their horses, but without uttering another word.

On the evening of the twenty-sixth, as they were entering Arras, and just as D'Artagnan had dismounted at the tavern of the Golden Harrow to drink a glass of wine, a cavalier came out of the yard of the posting house, where he had just changed his horse, and proceeded at full gallop on the road to Paris. At the moment that he issued from the great gate in the street the wind opened the cloak in which he was wrapped, although it was the month of August, and lifted up the hat, which the traveler caught and pulled violently down upon his forehead.

D'Artagnan, whose looks were fixed upon this man, turned very pale and let fall his glass.

"What is the matter, sir?" cried Planchet. "Oh! here, here! Make haste, gentlemen, my master is ill!"

The three friends hastened in and found D'Artagnan, who, instead of being ill, was running to his horse. They stopped him on the threshold of the door.

"Halloo! where the plague are you going in this manner?" cried Athos.

"It is he!" exclaimed D'Artagnan, pale with passion and with the perspiration standing on his brow; "it is he! let me get at him!"

"But what do you mean?" demanded Athos.

"He! that man!"

"What man?"

"That cursed man, my evil genius, whom I have always seen when I was threatened with some misfortune—he who accompanied that horrible woman when I met her the first time—he whom I was seeking when I affronted our friend Athos—he whom I saw the very morning of the day when Madame Bonancieux was carried off—the Man of Meung, in fact! I saw him—it is he! I recognized him when the wind opened his cloak."

"The devil!" said Athos, musing.

"To horse, gentlemen: to horse! Let us pursue him—we must catch him!"

"My dear fellow," said Aramis, "consider that he is going exactly the opposite road to ours; that he has a fresh horse, whilst our horses are tired; and that consequently we should knock up our horses without even a chance of overtaking him. Let us leave the man, D'Artagnan, and save the woman."

"Halloo, sir!" cried out a stable-boy, running after the stranger: "Halloo, sir! here is a paper which fell out of your hat. Halloo, sir! Halloo!"

"My friend," said D'Artagnan, "half a pistole for that paper."

"Faith, with the greatest pleasure; here it is."

The stable-boy, delighted at the good day's work he had made of it, returned into the yard of the hotel, and D'Artagnan unfolded the paper.

"Well?" inquired his friends, listening.

"Only one word!" said D'Artagnan.

"Yes," said Aramis, "but that word is the name of a town."

"*Armentières*," read Porthos. "Armentières? I do not know the place."

"And this name of a town is written by her hand," said Athos.

"Come, come, let us take great care of this paper," said D'Artagnan; "perhaps I shall not have thrown away my half-pistole. To horse, my friends! to horse!"

The four companions went off at a gallop on the road to Bethune.

CHAPTER LXI.

THE CARMELITE CONVENT OF BETHUNE.

GREAT criminals are endowed with a kind of predestination which enables them to surmount every obstacle and to escape every danger, until the moment which a wearied Providence has fixed upon for the shipwreck of their unhallowed fortunes.

Thus was it with Her Ladyship. She passed between the cruisers of two nations and landed at Boulogne without accident.

When she disembarked at Portsmouth Her Ladyship had been an Englishwoman, driven from Rochelle by the persecution of France. When she came on shore at Boulogne, after a voyage of two days, she represented herself as a Frenchwoman whom the English annoyed at Portsmouth on account of the hatred which they entertained against France.

Her Ladyship had, moreover, the best of passports—beauty—aided by the liberality with which she scattered her pistoles. Freed from the customary formalities by the affable smile and gallant manners of an old governor of the port, who kissed her hands, she only remained at Boulogne a sufficient time to put into the post a letter, written in these terms :

"*To his Eminence, the Lord Cardinal Richelieu, at his camp before La Rochelle.*

"MY LORD,—Your eminence may be assured that his grace the Duke of Buckingham will not set out for France. LADY DE ****

"Boulogne, August 25—Evening."

"P.S.—According to your eminence's desire, I am proceeding to the Carmelite Convent at Bethune, where I shall await your orders."

In fact, Her Ladyship began her journey on the same evening. Night overtook her and she stopped and slept at a tavern on the road; at five o'clock the next morning she resumed her journey and in three hours reached Bethune. She inquired her way to the Convent of the Carmelites, and immediately entered it. The abbess came to meet her, and when Her Ladyship showed the cardinal's order, a chamber was immediately prepared for her, and breakfast served.

The scenes of the past had all faded from this woman's sight, and with her eyes fixed upon the future she only saw the high fortune which was reserved for her by that cardinal whom she had so happily served, without his name being at all compromised in the bloody deed. The ever changing passions which consumed her gave to her life the appearance of the clouds which ascend into the sky, reflecting sometimes the azure tint, sometimes the lurid, sometimes the blackness of the storm, yet leaving no traces but those of devastation and of death.

After her breakfast the abbess came to pay her a visit. There are but few amusements in the cloister and the good superior was in haste to make acquaintance with her new boarder.

Her Ladyship wished to please the abbess, and this was a very easy task for a woman so truly superior; she endeavored to be amiable and became charming; so that her entertainer was seduced by her varied conversation, as well as by the graces which appeared in all her person.

The abbess, who was of a noble family, more especially loved that gossip of the court which so rarely reaches the extremities of the kingdom and which has, especially, so much difficulty in passing through the walls of a convent, on the threshold of which all worldly sounds should cease.

Her Ladyship, however, was well versed in all the intrigues of the aristocracy, in the midst of which she had constantly lived for five or six years; she therefore set about amusing the good abbess with an account of all the worldly practices of the French court, mixed up with the excessive devotions of the king. She gave her also the chronicle of scandals concerning those lords and ladies of the court with whose names the abbess was familiar, and touched lightly on the amours of the queen and Buckingham—talking herself a great deal, that she might thus induce the abbess to talk a little.

But the abbess contented herself with listening and smiling, without replying. Nevertheless, as Her Ladyship perceived that this sort of stories amused her greatly, she continued them, only she diverted the conversation upon the cardinal. On this point, however, she was slightly embarrassed, as she knew not whether the abbess was royalist or cardinalist. She therefore kept prudently betwixt the two. The abbess on her part maintained a still more prudent reserve, contenting herself with making a profound inclination of the head as often as the traveler mentioned the cardinal's name.

Her Ladyship soon began to think that she should find this convent very tiresome. She resolved, therefore, to risk something, in order to know what course to steer. Wishing to ascertain how far the discretion of the abbess would extend, she began to speak unfavorably, at first by hints and then most circumstantially, of the cardinal; relating the amours of that minister with Madame d'Aiguillon, Marion de Lorme, and some other women of gallantry.

The abbess listened more attentively, gradually became more animated, and smiled.

"Good," thought Her Ladyship, "she begins to relish my conversation. If she is a cardinalist she is, at any rate, no very fanatical one."

She then dwelt upon the persecution which the cardinal exercised against his enemies. The abbess merely crossed herself, without approving or blaming. This confirmed

Her Ladyship in the belief that the good superior was more of a royalist than a cardinalist, so she continued her remarks, becoming more and more severe.

"I am very ignorant on all such matters," said the abbess at last; "but remote as we are from the court, secluded as we find ourselves from intercourse with the world, we have most melancholy proofs of the truth of what you have been just relating, and one of our boarders has suffered bitterly from the vengeance and persecutions of the cardinal."

"One of your boarders," said Her Ladyship. "Oh! poor creature—how I pity her!"

"And you are right, for she is much to be pitied. Imprisonment, threats, ill-treatment—all these she has endured. But, after all," continued the abbess, "the cardinal had perhaps plausible reason for acting thus, and although she has the aspect of an angel, we must not always judge of people by their looks."

"Good!" said Her Ladyship to herself; "who knows? I may perhaps make some discovery here. I am in luck."

She then set herself to communicate to her countenance an expression of the most perfect candor.

"Alas!" said she, "I know that; they tell us that we must not trust to physiognomies. But what can we trust to, if not to the most beautiful of the Lord's works? As for me, I shall probably be deceived throughout my whole life, for I always confide in that person whose face inspires me with sympathy."

"You would be induced, then, to believe that this young woman is innocent," said the abbess.

"The cardinal does not merely punish crimes," replied Her Ladyship; "there are certain virtues which he visits more severely than sins."

"You will allow me, madame, to express my surprise," said the abbess.

"At what?" asked Her Ladyship, with apparent simplicity.

"At the language which you hold."

"And what do you find astonishing in that language?" demanded Her Ladyship, with a smile.

"You are the cardinal's friend, since he has sent you here, and yet——"

"And yet I speak ill of him," replied Her Ladyship, finishing the abbess's thought.

"At least you do not speak much good of him."

"It is because I am not his friend, but his victim," said Her Ladyship, sighing.

"And yet that letter by which he has recommended you to me——"

"Is an order to me to keep myself in a sort of prison, from which he will have me removed by some of his satellites."

"But why did you not escape?"

"Where should I go? Do you believe that there is a spot upon the earth which the cardinal cannot reach, if he pleases to take the trouble to stretch out his hand? If I were a man it might, perchance, be possible; but being a woman,—what would you have a woman do? This young boarder of yours—has she attempted to escape?"

"No, truly; but her case is different. I fancy that she is kept in France by some love affair."

"Then," said Her Ladyship, with a sigh, "if she loves, she is not altogether unhappy."

"So," said the abbess, looking with increasing interest at Her Ladyship, "it is another poor persecuted creature that I see?"

"Alas! yes," said Her Ladyship.

The abbess looked at Her Ladyship for an instant with some inquietude, as if a new thought was just arising in her mind.

"You are not an enemy of our most holy faith?" said she, stammering.

"I!" cried Her Ladyship, "I a Protestant! Oh, no! I call the God who hears us that I am, indeed, a zealous Catholic."

"Then, madame," replied the abbess, smiling, "be of

good heart ; the house in which you are shall not be a very severe prison to you and we will do all we can to soften your captivity. Moreover, you shall see that young woman, who is no doubt persecuted on account of some court intrigue ; she is so amiable and so gracious that she is sure to please you."

" What is her name ? "

" She has been recommended to me under the name of Kitty by a person of the highest rank. I have not endeavored to find out her other name."

" Kitty ! " exclaimed Her Ladyship ; " are you quite sure ? "

" Yes, madame ; at least she so calls herself. Do you suppose you know her ? "

Her Ladyship smiled as the idea suggested itself to her that this female might possibly be her former attendant. With her recollections of the young woman there was associated a sentiment of anger and a desire for revenge, which somewhat disturbed the serenity of her features ; but they soon resumed that expression of calmness and benevolence which this woman with a hundred faces had for the moment lost.

" But when may I see this young lady, for whom I already feel so great a sympathy ? " demanded Her Ladyship.

" This evening," replied the abbess ; " nay, even during the day. But as you say you have been traveling for four days and arose this morning at five o'clock, you must now be in want of rest ; lie down, therefore, and sleep, and we will awaken you at dinner-time."

Although Her Ladyship could have very well dispensed with sleep, supported as she was by the excitement which a new adventure kindled in her heart, so eager after intrigues, she nevertheless accepted the offer of the abbess. During the previous twelve or fourteen days she had experienced so many different emotions that, if her iron constitution was still able to endure fatigue, her mind required some repose. She therefore took leave of the abbess and lay down in peace, cradled in the ideas of

vengeance, to which the name of Kitty had so naturally led her. She remembered the almost unlimited promise which the cardinal had made to her if she should succeed in her enterprise. She *had* succeeded; and she might, therefore, avenge herself on D'Artagnan.

One thing alone alarmed Her Ladyship, and that was the recollection of her husband, the Count de la Fère, whom she had believed dead, or, at least, expatriated, and whom she now found in Athos, the dearest friend of D'Artagnan. But if he was D'Artagnan's friend he must have assisted him in all those plots, by the aid of which the queen had thwarted the designs of his eminence; if he was D'Artagnan's friend he must be the cardinal's enemy, and she would undoubtedly be able to envelop him in that vengeance, in the folds of which she hoped to stifle the young musketeer.

All these hopes formed agreeable thoughts to Her Ladyship, and lulled by them she soon slept. She was awakened by a soft voice, which sounded at the foot of her bed. On opening her eyes she saw the abbess, accompanied by a young woman with fair hair and a delicate complexion, who fixed on her a look full of kindly curiosity. The countenance of this young woman was entirely unknown to her. As they exchanged the usual courtesies they examined each other with scrupulous attention. Both were very beautiful, yet quite unlike each other in their kinds of beauty; and Her Ladyship smiled on observing that she had herself much more of a high-bred air and aristocratic manners. It is true that the dress of a novice, which the young woman wore, was not very favorable to a competition of the sort.

The abbess presented them to one another, and then, as her own duties demanded her attendance in the church, she left them alone together. The novice, seeing Her Ladyship in bed, would have followed the abbess, but Her Ladyship detained her.

"What, madame," said she, "I have scarcely seen you and you already wish to deprive me of your company,

which I had hoped to enjoy during the time that I may remain here."

"No, madame," replied the novice, "but as you are fatigued and were asleep, I fear that my visit has been badly timed."

"Well," said Her Ladyship, "what should be desired by those who sleep? A pleasant awakening. That is just what you have given me, so let me enjoy it at my ease!"

And taking her hand, she drew her to a chair near the bed.

"My God!" said the novice, seating herself, "how unfortunate I am. Here have I been in this house for six months without even the shadow of an amusement. You arrive; your presence would provide me with most charming company; and now, according to all probability, I shall immediately leave the convent."

"What," said Her Ladyship, "are you going away so soon?"

"At least I hope so," replied the novice, with an expression of joy which she did not in the least attempt to disguise.

"I think I heard that you had suffered from the persecutions of the cardinal," said Her Ladyship. "That is another ground of sympathy between us."

"What our good mother has told me is true, then, and you are also one of the cardinal's victims?"

"Hush!" said Her Ladyship; "even here do not let us thus speak of him. All my misfortunes have arisen from having spoken scarcely more than you have just said, before a woman whom I thought my friend and who betrayed me. And are you also the victim of treachery?"

"No," said the novice, "but of my devotion to a woman whom I loved, for whom I would have died, for whom I would die now."

"And who deserted you in your distress—is that the story?"

"I was unjust enough to believe so; but within the

last two or three days I have had proof to the contrary, and I thank God for it; I should have been deeply grieved at the conviction that she had forgotten me. But you, madame, you seem to be free and to be able to escape if you have any inclination to do so."

"And where could I go, without friends, without money, in a part of France which I do not know, where——"

"Oh! as to friends," said the novice, "you will find them wherever you please; you look so good and you are so beautiful."

"That is no reason," said Her Ladyship, softening her smile so as to give herself an angelic expression, "why I should not be forsaken and persecuted."

"Listen," said the novice; "you must trust in Heaven; there always comes a moment when the good that we have done pleads for us before God's throne. Besides, it is perhaps a piece of good fortune for you, that, humble and powerless as I am, you should have met me here; for, if I should get away, I have some influential friends, who, having exerted themselves for me, may also assist you."

"Oh! when I said that I was solitary and forsaken," said Her Ladyship, hoping to make the novice speak more plainly by speaking herself, "it is not because I have not some lofty acquaintances also, but these acquaintances all tremble before the cardinal. The queen herself does not defend me against this terrible minister, and I have proofs that her majesty, in spite of her excellent heart, has been more than once obliged to abandon to his eminence's rage persons who had faithfully served her."

"Believe me, madame, it may have appeared that the queen forsook her friends, but we must not believe the appearance; the more they are persecuted, the more she thinks of them; and often at the very moment when they suppose she is the least mindful of them, they receive an evidence of her kind remembrance."

"Ah!" said Her Ladyship, "I believe it; the queen is so good!"

"Oh! you know her, then—this beautiful and noble

queen—since you speak of her thus!" exclaimed the novice enthusiastically.

"That is to say," replied Her Ladyship, rather forced back into her intrenchments, "I have not the honor of knowing her personally, but I know many of her most intimate friends. I know M. de Putange, I know M. Dujart in England; and I know M. de Treville."

"M. de Treville!" exclaimed the novice; "do you know M. de Treville?"

"Yes, very well indeed."

"The captain of the king's musketeers?"

"Yes, the captain of the king's musketeers!"

"Oh! then you will see presently that we must be acquainted—almost friends. If you know M. de Treville you must have been at his house?"

"Often," said Her Ladyship, who, having entered on this path, and finding falsehood profitable, determined to pursue it to the end.

"At his house you must have seen some of his musketeers!"

"All of them whom he is in the habit of receiving," replied her Ladyship, who began to take a real interest in the conversation.

"Name some of those that you know," said the novice, "and you will see that they are amongst my friends."

"Why," said Her Ladyship, somewhat confused, "I know M. de Louvigny, M. de Courtivron, M. de Ferusac."

The novice let her go on, but seeing her hesitate, said:

"Do you know a gentleman named Athos?"

Her Ladyship became as pale as the sheets on which she was reclining, and mistress as she was of her emotions, she could not help uttering a cry, as she seized the hand of the novice and fastened her gaze upon her.

"Ah! what is the matter with you? Oh, my God!" said the poor young woman, "have I said anything to offend you?"

"No, but I was struck by the name, for I have been acquainted with this gentleman also; and it seemed strange that I should meet with any one who knew him well."

"Oh, yes, very well; and his friends also, M. Porthos and M. Aramis."

"Really? And I knew them, too," exclaimed Her Ladyship, who felt a cold shudder penetrating to her heart.

"Well, if you are acquainted with them you ought to know that they are good and brave companions. Why do you not apply to them if you want protection?"

"That is to say," stammered Her Ladyship, "I am not very intimate with any of them. I know them, having heard them spoken of by one of their friends, M. d'Artagnan."

"You know M. d'Artagnan!" exclaimed the novice in turn, seizing Her Ladyship's hand and devouring her with her eyes. Then remarking the strange expression of Her Ladyship's countenance: "Pardon me, madame; you know him, and in what character?"

"Why," replied Her Ladyship, in some embarrassment, "in the character of a friend."

"You deceive me, madame," said the novice; "you have been his mistress."

"It is you who have been so," said Her Ladyship in turn.

"I, I?" said the novice.

"Yes, you; I know you now; you are Madame Bonancieux."

The young woman drew herself back, overwhelmed with astonishment and terror.

"Oh! do not deny it, but pray answer," said her Ladyship.

"Well! yes, madame, I love him," said the novice. "Are we rivals?"

Her Ladyship's face was irradiated by a light so wild, that under any other circumstances Madame Bonancieux would have fled from her in affright; but she was entirely absorbed by jealousy.

"Come! tell me, madame," said Madame Bonancieux, with an energy of which she would have been thought incapable, "have you been his mistress?"

"Oh, no!" exclaimed Her Ladyship, in a tone which precluded any doubt of her truth; "never! never!"

"I believe you," said Madame Bonancieux; "but why did you cry out so?"

"What, do you not understand?" said Her Ladyship, who had already recovered from her confusion and had resumed all her presence of mind.

"How should I understand? I know nothing——"

"Do you not understand that M. d'Artagnan, being my friend, made me his confidante?"

"Really!"

"Do you not understand that I am acquainted with everything that has taken place; your abduction from the little house of St. Germain, his despair, that of his friends, and their researches ever since that time? Would you not expect me to be astonished on finding myself, without being aware of it, by the side of the woman of whom we have so often talked together—whom he loves with all the strength of his soul—whom he made me love before I beheld you! Ah, dear Constance, I find you at last—at last I see you."

Her Ladyship held out her arms toward Madame Bonancieux, who, convinced by what she had just heard, now saw in this woman, whom she had an instant before regarded as a rival, only a sincere and devoted friend.

"Oh, pardon me, pardon me!" said she, allowing herself to sink upon her shoulder. "I love him so much!"

These two women held each other for an instant thus embraced. Certainly, if Her Ladyship's strength had been but equal to her hatred, Madame Bonancieux would not have left her arms alive. But not being able to stifle her, she smiled.

"Oh, dear little beauty!" said Her Ladyship, "how delighted I am to see you! Let me look at you." And as she uttered these words, she did, in fact, devour her with her eyes. "Yes, it is certainly you. Ah, after what he told me of you, I recognize you perfectly well."

The poor young woman could not suspect the horrid cruelty that was raging behind the ramparts of that

unruffled brow, or behind those eyes in which she only read the interest of compassion.

"Then you know what I have suffered," said Madame Bonancieux, "since he has told you what he himself endured. But to suffer for him is happiness."

Her Ladyship replied mechanically, "Yes, it is happiness." But she was thinking of something different.

"And then," continued Madame Bonancieux, "my punishment draws near its end. To-morrow—this very evening, perhaps—I shall see him once more; and then the past will be forgotten."

"This evening? To-morrow?" exclaimed Her Ladyship, aroused from her reverie by these words; "what can you mean? Do you expect to hear anything about him?"

"I expect him himself."

"Himself? D'Artagnan here?"

"Yes, himself."

"But it is impossible! He is at the siege of La Rochelle, with the cardinal; he will not return to Paris until after the town is taken."

"You think so; but is there anything impossible to my D'Artagnan, the noble and loyal gentleman?"

"Oh, I cannot believe you!"

"Well, then, read!" said the unhappy young woman, in the excess of her pride and joy, and showing a letter to Her Ladyship.

"The writing of Madame de Chevreuse," said Her Ladyship to herself. "Ah! I was quite sure that there were some communications in that quarter." And she eagerly read these lines:

"My dear child, be ready. *Our friend* will soon see you, and he will only come to snatch you from the prison where it was necessary for your safety to conceal you. So prepare for your departure and never despair of us. Our brave Gascon has just shown himself as brave and as faithful as ever; tell him that there is much gratitude in a certain quarter for the warning which he gave."

"Yes, yes," said Her Ladyship, "the letter is very precise. And do you know what this warning was?"

"No; I only suspect that he must have warned the queen of some new machination of the cardinal."

"Yes, that is it, unquestionably," said Her Ladyship, returning the letter and letting her head fall pensively on her breast.

At that moment the gallop of a horse was heard.

"Oh," exclaimed Madame Bonancieux, rushing to the window, "can this be he?"

Her Ladyship remained in her bed, petrified by the surprise. So many unsuspected things had suddenly happened to her that for the first time her heart failed her.

"He! he!" muttered she, "and if it should be?" And she continued in bed, with her eyes fixed on vacancy.

"Alas! no," said Madame Bonancieux. "It is a man whom I do not know. But he seems to be coming here. Yes, he is riding more slowly—he stops at the gate—he rings."

Her Ladyship sprang out of bed. "You are quite sure that it is not he?"

"Oh! yes, certain."

"Perhaps you do not see him distinctly."

"Oh! should I see only the plume in his hat or the gem of his cloak, I should not fail to recognize him!"

Her Ladyship was hurrying on her clothes. "No matter; the man is coming here, you say?"

"Yes, he has come in."

"It must be either for you or for me."

"Oh, my God! how agitated you are!"

"Yes; I confess that I have not your confidence; I read everything from the cardinal."

"Hush!" said Madame Bonancieux; "some one is coming."

The door opened and the abbess entered.

"Did you come from Boulogne?" demanded she of Her Ladyship.

"Yes, madame," replied the latter, endeavoring to resume her calmness; "who wants me?"

"A man who will not give his name, but who comes from the cardinal."

"And who wants to speak to me?" demanded Her Ladyship.

"Who wants to speak with a lady who has just arrived from Boulogne."

"Then show him in, madame, I beseech you."

"Oh! my God! my God!" said Madame Bonancieux, "can it be any bad news?"

"I fear so."

"I leave you with this stranger; but as soon as he is gone I will return, if you will allow me."

"Yes; I beseech you to do so!"

The abbess and Madame Bonancieux left the room. Her Ladyship remained alone, with her eyes fixed upon the door. A moment afterward came the sound of spurs jingling on the stairs; the steps came nearer, the door was opened and a man appeared. Her Ladyship uttered a cry of joy. This man was the Count de Rochefort, the evil spirit of his eminence.

CHAPTER LXII.

TWO KINDS OF DEMONS.

"Ah!" exclaimed both Rochefort and Her Ladyship at the same instant, "is it you?"

"Yes, it is I."

"And you come from——" demanded Her Ladyship.

"From La Rochelle. And you?"

"From England."

"And Buckingham——"

"Is dead or dangerously wounded. As I was leaving without having obtained anything from him, a fanatic had just assassinated him."

"Ah!" said Rochefort, smiling, "that was a very fortunate chance, which will much please his eminence. Have you informed him of it?"

"I wrote to him from Boulogne. But what brings you here?"

"His eminence, being uneasy, has sent me to look for you."

"I only arrived yesterday."

"And what have you been doing since?"

"I have not been wasting my time."

"Oh, I do not suspect you."

"Do you know whom I have met with here?"

"No."

"Guess."

"How can I?"

"That young woman whom the queen took from prison."

"What! the mistress of young D'Artagnan?"

"Yes, Madame Bonancieux, whose hiding-place the cardinal could not discover."

"Well, then," said Rochefort, "this is a chance quite fit to pair with the other. Verily, the cardinal is a fortunate man."

"Fancy my astonishment," continued Her Ladyship, "when I found myself face to face with this woman."

"Does she know you?"

"No."

"Then she looks upon you as a stranger?"

Her Ladyship smiled. "I am her dearest friend."

"Upon my honor," said Rochefort, "my dear countess, it is only you who can perform this sort of miracle."

"And well it is that I can, chevalier," said Her Ladyship, "for do you know what is about to happen?"

"No."

"They are coming for her to-morrow or the next day, with an order from the queen."

"Really! And who are they?"

"D'Artagnan and his dearest friends."

"Verily, they will do so much that we shall be obliged to put them into the Bastile."

"And why has it not been done already?"

"How can I tell? Because the cardinal evinces toward these men a weakness which I cannot comprehend."

"Really! Well, then, tell him this, Rochefort: tell him that our conversation at the Red Dove-cote was heard by these four men—tell him that after his departure one of them came up and took from me by force the passport he had given me—tell him that they gave Lord de Winter warning of my voyage to England—that this time again, they nearly prevented the success of my undertaking, as they did that of the diamond studs—tell him that amongst these four men only two are to be feared, D'Artagnan and Athos—tell him that the third, Aramis, is the lover of Madame de Chevreuse: he must be allowed to live, for his secret is known and he may be made useful; and as for the fourth, Porthos, he is a fool, a fop, a ninny, not worth giving one's self the smallest trouble about."

"But these four men ought to be at this moment at the siege of La Rochelle."

"I thought so, too; but a letter which Madame Bonancieux has received from Madame de Chevreuse, and which she had the imprudence to communicate to me, leads me to believe that these four men are now on their way to carry her off."

"The devil! What must we do?"

"What did the cardinal say to you about me?"

"That I was to take your dispatches, whether verbal or written, and to return by post. When he knows what you have done he will give you further directions."

"I must remain here, then?"

"Here, or in the neighborhood."

"You cannot take me with you?"

"No, the order is precise. In the neighborhood of the camp you might be recognized; and you can understand that your presence might compromise his eminence, especially after what has just happened in England. Only tell me beforehand where you will await the cardinal's orders, that I may know where to find you."

"Listen; it is very probable that I cannot remain here."

"Why?"

"You forget that my enemies may arrive at any moment."

"True. But then this little woman will escape his eminence."

"Bah!" said Her Ladyship, with a smile peculiar to herself; "you forget that I am her best friend."

"Ah! that is true. Then may I tell the cardinal, with regard to this woman——"

"That he may make himself easy."

"Is that all? Will he know what that means?"

"He will guess it."

"And now, let us see, what I ought to do."

"You must set off this instant. It appears to me that the news you carry is well worth the trouble of a little haste."

"My carriage broke down on entering Lilliers."

"Excellent."

"What do you mean by *excellent?*"

"Why, I want your carriage."

"And how am I to travel, then?"

"On post-horses."

"You talk of it very unconcernedly—a hundred and eighty leagues."

"What does that signify?"

"Well, it shall be done. What next?"

"On passing through Lilliers you will send your carriage to me, with directions to your servant to attend to my commands."

"Very well."

"You have, no doubt, some order from the cardinal in your possession?"

"Yes, I have my plenary authority."

"You will show that to the abbess and you will tell her that I will be sent for either to-day or to-morrow, and that I must accompany the person sent in your name."

"Very well."

"Do not forget to speak harshly of me when you talk to the abbess."

"Why so?"

"I am one of the cardinal's victims. I must inspire some confidence in that poor little Madame Bonancieux."

"True. And now will you make me a report of all that has occurred?"

"I have already told you the events, and you have a good memory; so repeat what I told you. A paper may be lost."

"You are right; only let me know where you are to be found, that I may not have to run about the country in vain."

"Ah! that is true. Wait."

"Do you require a map?"

"Oh, I know this country well."

"You? When did you ever visit it?"

"I was educated here."

"Indeed!"

"It is some advantage, you see, to have been educated somewhere."

"You will wait for me, then——"

"Let me consider a moment—ah! yes, at Armentières."

"And where is Armentières?"

"It is a little village on the Lys. I shall only have to cross the river and I shall be in a foreign country."

"Capital; but you must remember that you are only to cross the river in case of danger."

"That is understood."

"And in that case how shall I discover where you are?"

"You do not want your servant? Is he one on whom you can depend?"

"Perfectly."

"Give him to me; no one knows him. I will leave him at the place I quit and he will conduct you to me."

"And you say that you will wait for me at Armentières?"

"At Armentières."

"Write the name for me on a slip of paper, lest I

should forget it. The name of a village will not compromise any one, will it ? "

" Ah ! who knows ? but never mind," said Her Ladyship, writing the name on a half-sheet of paper, " I will run the hazard."

" Good," said Rochefort, taking from Her Ladyship's hands the paper, which he folded and stuffed into the lining of his hat.

" And I shall, besides, do like the children, and, as a provision against the loss of the paper, I shall repeat the name all the way I go. Now is that all ? "

" I think so."

" Let us see: Buckingham dead or grievously wounded; your conversation with the cardinal heard by the musketeers ; Lord de Winter warned of your arrival at Portsmouth ; D'Artagnan and Athos to the Bastile ; Aramis, the lover of Madame de Chevreuse ; Porthos a fool ; Madame Bonancieux discovered ; to send you the carriage as soon as possible ; to put my servant under your orders ; to make you a victim of the cardinal, that the abbess may have no suspicion ; Armentières, on the banks of the Lys ; is that right ? "

" Verily, my dear chevalier, you are a miracle of memory. But, by the way, add one thing."

" And what is that ? "

" I saw some very pretty woods, which must join the gardens of the convent. Say that I may be allowed to walk in these woods. Who knows ? I may perhaps be obliged to get out by some back door."

" You think of everything."

" And you forget one thing."

" What is that ? "

" To ask me whether I want any money."

" Exactly ; how much will you have ? "

" All the gold you may have about you."

" I have nearly five hundred pistoles."

" I have about as many. With a thousand pistoles one may face anything. Empty your pockets."

" There."

"Good. And when do you set off?"

"In one hour; just time enough to eat a morsel, whilst I send to fetch a post-horse."

"Excellent. Adieu, count."

"Adieu, countess."

"My compliments to the cardinal."

"Mine to Satan."

Her Ladyship and Rochefort exchanged smiles, and separated.

In an hour afterward Rochefort set out at full speed, and five hours afterward he passed through Arras. Our readers already know how he was recognized by D'Artagnan, and how that recognition, by exciting the fears of our four musketeers, had given new activity to their journey

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CHAPTER LXIII.

A DROP OF WATER.

SCARCELY had Rochefort left, before Madame Bonancieux returned. She found Her Ladyship with a smiling countenance.

"Well," said the young woman, "what you feared has happened. This evening or to-morrow the cardinal will send for you!"

"How do you know that?"

"I heard it from the lips of the messenger himself."

"Come and sit down by me," said Her Ladyship; "but first let me be sure that no one hears us."

"And why all these precautions?"

"You will soon know."

Her Ladyship arose, went to the door, opened it, looked along the corridor, and then came back and seated herself again by the side of Madame Bonancieux.

"Then," said she again, "he played his part well."

"Who did?"

"He who introduced himself to the abbess as the envoy of the cardinal."

"Was it, then, a part that he was acting?"

"Yes, my child."

"Then that man is not——"

"That man," said Her Ladyship, lowering her voice, "is my brother."

"Your brother!" exclaimed Madame Bonancieux.

"Nobody but you knows this secret, my child; if you should intrust it to anybody in the world I should be ruined, and you, also, perhaps."

"Oh, God!"

"Listen: this is what has taken place. My brother, who was coming to my aid to take me away from here, by force if necessary, met the cardinal's emissary, who was on his way to fetch me. He followed him. On arriving at a retired, solitary spot, he drew his sword and commanded the messenger to deliver to him the papers which he carried. The messenger endeavored to defend himself and my brother slew him."

"Oh!" said Madame Bonancieux, shuddering.

"There was no alternative, remember. My brother then determined to make use of craft instead of force. He took the papers, presented himself here as the emissary of the cardinal himself, and in an hour or two a carriage will come and take me away in his eminence's name."

"I understand; it is your brother who will send this carriage?"

"Exactly so. But that is not all; that letter which you have received and which you believe to be from Madame Chevreuse——"

"Well?"

"Is a forgery."

"What?"

"Yes, a forgery; it is a snare, that you may make no resistance when they come to fetch you."

"But it is D'Artagnan who will come!"

"Undeceive yourself; D'Artagnan and his friends are at the siege of La Rochelle."

"How do you know that?"

"My brother met with some of the cardinal's agents in the uniform of musketeers. They were to call you out to the gate; you would have believed that you were in the company of friends; and they were to carry you off and convey you to Paris."

"Oh, Heaven! my mind fails me in the midst of such a chaos of iniquities. I feel that if it lasts long," said Madame Bonancieux, putting her hands to her head, "I shall go mad."

"Listen! I hear the step of a horse; it is that of my brother, who is going away. I must take a last farewell of him. Come."

Her Ladyship opened the window and made a sign to Madame Bonancieux to join her The young woman went to her, and Rochefort passed by at a gallop.

"Good-bye, brother," said Her Ladyship.

The chevalier raised his head, saw the two young women, and, as he went rapidly past, made a friendly farewell motion with his hand.

"That good George!" said she, closing the window, with an expression of countenance full of affection and melancholy.

She returned and sat down in her place as though buried in thoughts of a personal kind.

"Dear lady," said Madame Bonancieux, "pardon me for interrupting you, but what do you advise me to do? You have more experience than I have; speak, and I will listen."

"In the first place," said Her Ladyship, "I might possibly be deceived, and D'Artagnan and his friends may be really coming to your assistance."

"Oh! that would be too fortunate," said Madame Bonancieux, "and I fear that so much happiness is not reserved for me."

"Then, do you see, it would be merely a question of time; a kind of race as to which should arrive first. If it should be your friends who made best haste, why,

then, you would be saved; but if it were the cardinal's satellites, then you would be ruined."

"Oh! yes, yes! lost without mercy. But what must I do? what must I do?"

"There is one very simple and very natural plan."

"And what is that? Tell me!"

"It would be to wait, concealed in the neighborhood and so to make yourself sure who the men were who came to seek you."

"But where can I wait?"

"Oh, that is not a matter of difficulty. I myself must wait and conceal myself at a few leagues' distance from here until my brother comes to meet me. Well, then, I shall take you with me—we can hide and wait together."

"But I shall not be allowed to leave this place; I am almost regarded as a prisoner here."

"As it is supposed that I leave on account of an order from the cardinal, it will not be believed that you are very anxious to follow me."

"Well?"

"Very well. The carriage being at the door, you will bid me adieu, and you will get upon the steps to press me in your arms for the last time. My brother's servant, who is coming to fetch me, being forewarned, will give a signal to the postillion, and we shall go off at full gallop."

"But D'Artagnan—if he should come?"

"Shall we not know it?"

"How?"

"Nothing is more easy. We will send this servant of my brother's, in whom I have told you that I have the greatest confidence, back to Bethune; and he shall disguise himself and find a lodging opposite the convent. If it should be the cardinal's emissaries who come, he will not stir; if it should be M. d'Artagnan and his friends, he will lead them to where we are."

"He knows them, then?"

"Certainly; has he not seen M. d'Artagnan at my house?"

"Oh! yes, yes, you are right. Thus all will go on well. But do not let us go far away from here."

"Seven or eight leagues at the most. We will keep upon the frontiers and upon the first alarm we will quit France."

"In the meantime, what must we do?"

"Wait."

"But if they should come!"

"My brother's carriage will arrive before them."

"Suppose I should be away from you when it arrived —at dinner or at supper, for example?"

"Tell our good abbess that in order that we may be as little separated as possible, you request her to allow you to take your meals with me."

"Will she permit it?"

"What objection can there be to that? Go down now to her and make your request. I feel my head a little heavy and so I shall take a turn in the garden."

"And where may I see you again?"

"Here, in one hour from this time."

"Here, in one hour! Oh, you are very kind and I thank you."

"How should I avoid being interested in you? If you had not been beautiful and charming, are you not the friend of one of my best friends?"

"Dear D'Artagnan! Oh, how he will thank you!"

"I hope so. Come, it is all arranged; let us go down."

"You are going to the garden? Proceed along this corridor; a little staircase leads you to it."

"Good. Thank you."

And the two ladies separated, exchanging charming smiles.

Her Ladyship had spoken the truth; her head was heavy, for her projects, badly arranged, clashed against each other as in chaos. She had need to be alone that she might put a little order into her ideas. She saw dimly into the future, but it required some moments of silence and tranquillity to give to this confused assem-

blage of conceptions a definite form and a decided plan. What was now most urgent was to carry off Madame Bonancieux and put her in a place of security, and then, should her game fail, to use her as a hostage. Her Ladyship began to dread the issue of this terrible duel, in which her enemies were quite as persevering as she herself was unrelenting. Besides, she felt, as one feels the approaches of a storm, that this issue was near and would not fail to be fearful.

The principal point for her was, as we have said, to get possession of Madame Bonancieux. By this means she would hold in her hands the life of D'Artagnan, or more, even, than his life, for she would hold that of the woman he loved. In case of evil fortune it was a means of opening negotiations and of securing favorable terms.

Now, it was certain that Madame Bonancieux would follow her without distrust; and let her be but once concealed with her at Armentières, it would be easy to make her believe that D'Artagnan had never visited Bethune. In a fortnight, at most, Rochefort would return. During that time she would meditate on what she must do to avenge herself on the four friends. She would not be impatient, for she would have the sweetest occupation that events can ever give to a woman of her character—a hearty vengeance to perfect.

Whilst thus meditating she cast her eye around her and mapped out in her mind the topography of the garden. Her Ladyship was like a good general, who foresees at the same time both victory and defeat and who is quite ready, according to the chances of the battle, either to advance or to retreat.

At the expiration of an hour she heard a soft voice calling her. It was Madame Bonancieux. The good abbess had consented to everything, and to begin, they were just about to sup together. On entering the court they heard the sound of a carriage which was stopping at the gate. Her Ladyship listened.

"Do you hear?" said she.

"Yes; the rolling of a carriage."

"It is that which my brother sends for us."

"Oh, God!"

"Come, have courage!"

There was a ring at the convent gate. Her Ladyship was not mistaken.

"Go up into your room," said she to Madame Bonancieux; "you must have some trinkets that you would like to carry with you."

"I have his letters," replied she.

"Well, go for them and come back to me in my room; we will sup hastily, for, as we shall perhaps have to travel a part of the night, we must recruit our strength."

"Great God!" said Madame Bonancieux, placing her hands upon her heart; "I am choking—I cannot walk."

"Courage! come, take courage! Think that in a quarter of an hour you will be safe, and think that what you are about to do is done for his sake."

"Oh, yes, all, all for him! You have restored my courage by that single word. Go; I will rejoin you."

Her Ladyship went hastily up to her own room, where she found Rochefort's valet and gave him his instructions. He was to wait for her at the gate; if by chance the musketeers should arrive, he was to go off at a gallop, make the circuit of the convent and wait for her at a little village which was situated on the other side of the wood. In that case Her Ladyship would walk through the garden and reach the village on foot; we have already said that Her Ladyship was perfectly well acquainted with this part of France. If the musketeers should not make their appearance, everything would be conducted as had been previously arranged. Madame Bonancieux was to get into the carriage on pretence of wishing her once more adieu, and she would then escape with her.

Madame Bonancieux came in, and to remove all suspicion, if she had any, Her Ladyship repeated to the valet, in her presence, the latter part of his instructions. Her Ladyship then made some inquiries about the car-

riage; it was a chaise, drawn by three horses and driven by a postillion. The valet was to precede it as a courier.

Her Ladyship was altogether wrong in fearing that suspicion troubled Madame Bonancieux. The poor young woman was too pure herself to suspect another of so black a perfidy. Besides, the name of Lady de Winter, which she had heard mentioned by the abbess, was entirely unknown to her; and she had not imagined that a woman had performed so large and fatal a part in bringing about the misfortunes of her life.

"You see," said Her Ladyship, when the valet had left the room, "that everything is ready. The abbess has not the slightest suspicion and fully believes that I am sent for by the cardinal. The man has gone out to give his final orders; eat something, however little; drink a thimbleful of wine, and let us be off."

"Yes," said Madame Bonancieux, mechanically, "yes, let us go."

Her Ladyship made her a sign to sit down, poured out for her a small glass of Spanish wine, and helped her to a part of the breast of a chicken.

"There," said she; "everything is propitious; here is the night coming on; at daybreak we shall have reached our retreat and no one will suspect where we are. Come, have courage and take something."

Madame Bonancieux ate two or three mouthfuls mechanically, and just put her lips to the wine.

"Come, come," said Her Ladyship, lifting her own glass toward her mouth, "do as I do."

But at the moment she was about to drink, her hand was suddenly arrested. Her ears caught the distant sound of an approaching gallop on the road, and then, almost at the same instant, she seemed to hear the neighing of the horses. This sound destroyed her exultation, as the uproar of a storm awakens us from a delightful dream. She grew pale and ran to the window; whilst Madame Bonancieux, who had got up, trembled so as to be obliged to support herself by a chair

for fear of falling. Nothing had yet become visible, but the galloping was more distinctly heard.

"Oh, my God!" said Madame Bonancieux, "what can that noise be?"

"That of our friends or our enemies," said Her Ladyship, with a terrible calmness. "Remain where you are and I will go and ascertain."

Madame Bonancieux remained standing, mute, motionless, and pale as a statue. The sound became more audible. The horses could not be more than a hundred and fifty yards off, but were not yet visible on account of a turning in the road. Still the noise was now so distinct that the number of the horses might have been counted by the clattering of their iron hoofs.

Her Ladyship gazed with the most intense attention; there was just light enough to recognize those who were approaching. Suddenly, at the turn of the road, she saw the glitter of laced hats and the waving of plumes; she counted two, then five, then eight horsemen. One of them was two lengths in advance of his companions. Her Ladyship gave utterance to a roar. In the foremost rider she recognized D'Artagnan.

"Oh, my God, my God!" exclaimed Madame Bonancieux, "what is the matter?"

"It is the uniform of the cardinal's guards—there is not a moment to be lost," exclaimed Her Ladyship. "Let us fly! let us fly!"

"Yes, yes, let us fly," repeated Madame Bonancieux, but without the power of moving one step, rooted as she was to her place by terror.

The horsemen were heard passing under her window.

"Come along; come along," said Her Ladyship, endeavoring to drag the young woman by the arm. "Thanks to the garden, we may yet escape, for I have got the key. But let us make haste; in less than five minutes it will be too late."

Madame Bonancieux attempted to walk, but after taking two steps, she fell upon her knees.

Her Ladyship attempted to lift her up and carry her,

but she found herself unable. At this moment they heard the wheels of the carriage, which on the appearance of the musketeers went off at a gallop, and then three or four shots resounded.

"For the last time, will you come?" exclaimed Her Ladyship.

"Oh, my God! my God! you see that my strength is all gone; you see that I cannot walk. Fly, and save yourself."

"Fly alone? Leave you here? No, no—never!" exclaimed Her Ladyship.

Suddenly a vivid lightning flashed from her eyes; she ran to the table and poured into Madame Bonancieux's glass the contents of the hollow part of a ring, which she opened with singular dexterity. It was a red particle, which was immediately dissolved. Then, taking the glass with a hand that did not tremble:

"Drink," said she, hastily; "this wine will give you strength—drink!"

She put the glass to the lips of the young woman, who drank mechanically.

"Ah! it was not thus that I wished to avenge myself," said Her Ladyship, putting the glass upon the table, with a hellish smile; "but, faith! we must do the best we can," and she rushed out of the room.

Madame Bonancieux saw her escape without being able to follow her. She was like those who dream that they are pursued, yet feel powerless to move. A few minutes elapsed and then a frightful noise was heard at the gate. At every instant Madame Bonancieux expected to see the reappearance of Her Ladyship, but she did not return. Many times—from terror, no doubt—the cold drops stood upon her burning brow.

At length she heard the rattling of the grated doors which were being opened; the noise of boots and spurs resounded on the stairs and there was a loud murmur of many approaching voices, in the midst of which she fancied that she heard her own name mentioned. Suddenly she uttered a loud scream of joy and rushed

toward the door—she had recognized the voice of D'Artagnan.

"D'Artagnan! D'Artagnan!" she exclaimed, "is it you? Here, here!"

"Constance! Constance!" replied the young man. "My God! where are you?"

At the same moment the door of the cell was burst in, rather than opened. Many men rushed into the room. Madame Bonancieux had fallen on a chair, without the power of motion. D'Artagnan cast away a still smoking pistol, which he held in his hand, and fell upon his knees before his mistress. Athos replaced his pistol in his belt, and Porthos and Aramis returned the swords, which they had drawn, into their sheaths.

"Oh! D'Artagnan, my beloved D'Artagnan! you come at last. You did not deceive me; it is really you."

"Yes, yes, Constance, we are at last united!"

"Oh! *she* told me in vain that you would never come. I always secretly hoped. I did not wish to fly. Oh, how wisely I have chosen! How happy I am!"

At the word *she*, Athos, who had quietly sat down, suddenly arose.

"*She?* Who is *she?*" demanded D'Artagnan.

"Why, my companion—she who, through friendship for me, wished to withdraw me from my persecutors; she who, taking you for the cardinal's guards, has just fled."

"Your companion!" exclaimed D'Artagnan, becoming paler than the white veil of his mistress; "of what companion are you talking?"

"Of her whose carriage was at the door—of a woman who called herself your friend, D'Artagnan—of a woman to whom you confided everything about us."

"Her name!" exclaimed D'Artagnan; "do you not know her name?"

"Yes, I do; they mentioned it before me. Wait—but it is very strange—oh, my God! my head becomes confused—I cannot see anything——"

"Come here, my friends! come here! her hands are

icy!" exclaimed D'Artagnan; "she is very ill. Great God! she is losing her senses."

Whilst Porthos was calling for help with all the power of his lungs, Aramis ran for a glass of water; but he stopped on beholding the fearful alteration in the countenance of Athos, who was standing before the table, with his hair on end and his features frozen with terror, looking into one of the glasses, and seeming a prey to the most horrible suspicion.

"Oh!" said Athos; "oh, no! it is impossible! Such a crime would never be permitted by the Almighty!"

"Some water! some water!" cried D'Artagnan; "some water!"

"Oh! poor woman! poor woman!" murmured Athos, in a faltering voice.

Madame Bonancieux opened her eyes once more at the caresses of D'Artagnan.

"She is recovering her senses!" exclaimed the young man; "Oh, my God! my God! I thank Thee!"

"Madame," said Athos, "in the name of Heaven, to whom does this empty glass belong?"

"To me, sir," replied the young woman, in a dying voice.

"But who poured out the wine which it contained?"

"She did!"

"But who is she?"

"Ah, I remember now," said Madame Bonancieux; "Lady de Winter."

The four friends uttered one unanimous cry, but the voice of Athos overpowered all the others. At the same moment Madame Bonancieux became livid; a deadly agony assailed her and she fell panting into the arms of Porthos and Aramis.

D'Artagnan grasped the hands of Athos in indescribable anguish. "Ah!" said he, "what do you believe——" His voice was choked by sobs.

"I believe the worst," replied Athos, biting his lips until they bled.

"D'Artagnan!" replied Madame Bonancieux, "where

are you? Don't leave me! you see that I am soon to die!"

D'Artagnan let go the hands of Athos, which he had pressed convulsively, and ran to her. Her countenance, before so beautiful, was now entirely distorted; her glassy eyes no longer saw; a convulsive shuddering agitated her whole frame, and icy drops were streaming from her brow.

"In the name of Heaven, run—Aramis—Porthos—and obtain some assistance!"

"All is useless!" said Athos; "all is useless! To the poison which *she* pours there is no antidote."

"Yes, yes—help!" murmured Madame Bonancieux. Then, collecting all her strength, she took the hand of the young man between her two hands, looked at him for an instant as if her whole soul was in that last look, and, with a sobbing cry, she pressed her lips upon his.

"Constance! Constance!" exclaimed D'Artagnan.

One sigh came from her lips, breathing over those of D'Artagnan, and that sigh was the passage of her loving soul to eternity.

D'Artagnan held only a lifeless body in his arms. He uttered a cry and fell beside his mistress, as pale and motionless as herself.

Porthos wept; Aramis raised his hand to Heaven; Athos crossed himself.

At that moment a man appeared at the door, almost as pale as those who were in the room. He looked around him and saw Madame Bonancieux dead and D'Artagnan senseless. He entered just at the moment of that stupor which succeeds great catastrophes.

"I was not mistaken," said he; "that is M. d'Artagnan, and you are his three friends, Messieurs Athos, Porthos and Aramis."

They whose names had been pronounced looked at the stranger with astonishment, and all thought that they knew him.

"Gentlemen," said the new-comer, "you, like myself, are seeking a woman, who," added he, with a terrible

smile, "must have been present here, for I see a dead body."

The three friends remained speechless, but the voice, as well as the countenance, recalled to their recollection some one they had previously seen, although they could not recollect under what circumstances.

"Gentlemen," continued the stranger, "since you will not recognize a man whose life you have probably twice saved, I must needs give my name. I am Lord de Winter, the brother-in-law of that woman."

The three friends uttered an exclamation of surprise. Athos arose and offered him his hand.

"Welcome, my lord," said he; "you are one of us."

"I left Portsmouth five hours after her," said Lord de Winter, "reached Boulogne three hours after her; I only missed her by twenty minutes at St. Omer, but at St. Lilliers I lost all trace of her. I wandered about at chance, inquiring of everybody, when I saw you pass at a gallop. I recognized M. d'Artagnan and called out to you, but you did not answer me. I attempted to keep up with you, but my horse was too tired to go at the same pace as yours did; and yet, in spite of all your haste, it seems that you have arrived too late."

"The proof is before you," said Athos, pointing to Madame Bonancieux, who was lying dead, and to D'Artagnan, whom Porthos and Aramis were endeavoring to restore to life.

"Are they both dead?" demanded Lord de Winter, calmly.

"No, happily," replied Athos. "D'Artagnan has only fainted."

"Ah! so much the better," said Lord de Winter.

In fact, at that moment D'Artagnan opened his eyes. He tore himself from the arms of Porthos and Aramis and threw himself like a madman on the body of his mistress.

Athos arose, walked toward his friend with a slow and solemn step, embraced him tenderly, and then, whilst D'Artagnan broke out in sobs, said to him, in his noble and persuasive tones:

"My friend, be a man! Women weep for the dead—men avenge them!"

"Oh, yes, yes!" cried D'Artagnan, "if it be to avenge her, I am ready to follow you."

Athos took advantage of this momentary strength, which the hope of vengeance had given to his unfortunate friend, to make a sign to Porthos and Aramis to go for the abbess. The two friends met her in the corridor, already much confounded and disturbed by so many events. She called some of the sisters, who, contrary to their conventual habits, found themselves in the presence of five men.

"Madame," said Athos, putting his arm under that of D'Artagnan, "we leave to your pious care the body of this unfortunate woman. She was an angel upon earth, before she became a saint in heaven. Treat her as if she had been one of your sisters; we will return some day to pray for her soul."

D'Artagnan hid his face against Athos's breast and sobbed violently.

"Weep," said Athos; "weep, heart full of love and youth and life. Alas! would that I could weep as you do!" And he led his friend away, affectionately as a father, consolingly as a priest, and firmly as a man who had himself endured much.

All five, followed by their servants leading their horses, then went toward the town of Bethune, of which the suburbs were in sight; and they stopped at the first hotel they found.

"But," asked D'Artagnan, "are we not going to follow that woman?"

"By and by," said Athos; "I have some preparations to make."

"She will escape," said the young man; "she will escape, Athos, and it will be your fault."

"I will answer for her," said Athos.

D'Artagnan had such perfect confidence in his friend's word that he bowed his head and entered the hotel without making the least reply. Porthos and Aramis

looked at each other, at a loss to understand the meaning of Athos. Lord de Winter thought that he only sought to soothe the grief of D'Artagnan.

"Now, gentlemen," said Athos, when he had ascertained that there were five unoccupied chambers in the hotel, "let each of us retire to his room. D'Artagnan ought to be alone to weep, and you to sleep. I take charge of everything; make yourselves perfectly easy."

"It appears to me, however," said Lord de Winter, "that if any measures are to be taken against the countess, the business is mine, seeing that she is my sister-in-law."

"And," said Athos, "she is my wife!"

D'Artagnan started, for he was satisfied that Athos was sure of his revenge, since he revealed such a secret. Porthos and Aramis looked at one another in consternation, and Lord de Winter thought that Athos had gone mad.

"Retire, then," said Athos, "and leave me to act. You see that, in my capacity of husband, this affair belongs to me. Only, D'Artagnan, if you have not lost it, give me that paper which fell from the man's hat and on which the name of a village is written."

"Ah!" cried D'Artagnan, "I understand; that name is written by her hand——"

"You see," said Athos, "that there is a God in heaven."

CHAPTER LXIV.

THE MAN IN THE RED CLOAK.

THE despair of Athos had given place to a concentrated grief, which made the brilliant qualities of the man even more lucid. Entirely engrossed by one thought—that of the promise he had made, and of the responsibility he had undertaken—he was the last to retire into his chamber, where he requested the landlord to bring

him a map of the province; and then he bent himself over it, examined the lines traced on it, and ascertaining that four different roads led from Bethune to Armentières, he ordered the valets to be called.

Planchet, Grimaud, Musqueton and Bazin entered and received the clear, precise and serious directions of Athos. At break of day the next morning they were to set off and proceed to Armentières, each by a different road. Planchet, the most intelligent of the four, was to follow that which had been taken by the carriage at which the three friends had fired, and which was attended, as may be remembered, by the servant of Count Rochefort.

Athos intrusted the valets with this duty, first, because since these men had been in his service or that of his friends, he had perceived in each of them some different and useful quality; and next, because servants awaken less suspicion in the minds of the peasants than their masters and excite more sympathy in the minds of those whom they address. And, lastly, Milady knew the masters, whilst she did not know the servants, who, on the other hand, knew Her Ladyship well. They were all four to be at an appointed place at eleven o'clock the next day. If they had discovered Her Ladyship's retreat, three of the four were to remain to watch her and the fourth was to return to Bethune to inform Athos and to guide the three friends.

These arrangements being made, the valets withdrew.

Athos then arose from his seat, girded on his sword, wrapped himself up in his cloak and left the hotel. It was about ten o'clock; and at ten at night, in the country, the streets are but little frequented. Nevertheless, Athos was evidently looking for some one, of whom he could ask a question. At last he met a late passenger, went up to him and spoke a few words. The man he addressed started back in fear, but yet he answered the inquiry of the musketeer by a sign. Athos offered the man half a pistole to accompany him, but he refused it. Athos then proceeded down the street which the man had pointed out with his finger, but

reaching a spot where several streets met, he stopped again in visible embarrassment. But as this was a more likely place than any other for some one to be seen, Athos waited there. In fact, a moment later a watchman passed. Athos repeated the question he had already asked of the person he first met. The watchman showed the same terror and also refused to accompany him, but he pointed to the road he was to take. Athos walked in the direction indicated and soon reached the suburbs of the town, in the opposite direction to that by which he and his companions had entered. There he again appeared uneasy and embarrassed and stopped for the third time. Fortunately a beggar who was passing by came up to solicit alms. Athos offered him a crown to accompany him where he was going. The beggar hesitated for an instant, but at the sight of the piece of silver shining in the darkness, he assented and walked before Athos.

Having reached the corner of the street, he pointed out, at a distance, a small, isolated, melancholy looking house, to which Athos proceeded, whilst the beggar, who had received his wages, took himself off at his utmost speed.

Athos walked quite around this house before he could distinguish the door amid the red color with which the hut was painted. No light pierced through the crevices of the shutters; no sound gave reason to suppose it was inhabited; it was sad and silent as the tomb. Athos knocked three times before any answer was given. At the third knock, however, steps were heard approaching, the door was partially opened and a man of tall stature, pale complexion and black beard and hair, appeared. Athos exchanged a few words with him in a whisper, and then the tall man made a sign to the musketeer that he might come in. Athos immediately availed himself of the permission and the door closed behind him.

The man whom Athos had come so far to seek, and whom he had found with so much difficulty, took him into a laboratory where he was engaged in joining to-

gether with iron wires the clattering bones of a skeleton. All the body was already adjusted and the head alone was lying on the table. All the furniture indicated that the owner of the room in which they were was engaged in natural science. There were bottles full of serpents labeled according to their kinds, and dried lizards, shining like emeralds, set in large frames of black wood. And lastly, boxes of wild, sweet-smelling plants, gifted undoubtedly with virtues unknown to mankind in general, were fastened to the ceiling and hung down the corners of the room. But there was no family, no servant; the tall man inhabited the house alone.

Athos cast a cold and indifferent glance on the objects we have just described, and on the invitation of the man whom he had come to seek, sat down beside him. He then explained the cause of his visit and the service he required of him; but scarcely had he stated his demand before the stranger, who had remained standing before the musketeer, started back in affright and refused. Athos then drew from his pocket a small paper on which two lines and a signature were written, accompanied by a seal, and presented it to him who had so prematurely shown these signs of repugnance. The tall man had scarcely read the two lines and seen the signature and recognized the seal before he bowed his head, as a token that he had no longer any objection to make and that he was prepared to obey. Athos demanded nothing more; he arose, left the house, returned by the road he had come, and re-entering the hotel, shut himself up in his own chamber.

At daybreak D'Artagnan entered his room and asked him what they were to do.

"Wait," replied Athos.

A few moments after the superior of the convent sent to inform the musketeers that the funeral would take place at mid-day. As for the murderess, no tidings of her had been heard. It was, however, clear that she must have fled through the garden, on the gravel paths of which the traces of her steps could be discerned, and

the door of which had been found locked and the key missing.

At the appointed hour Lord de Winter and the four friends proceeded to the convent. The bells were sounding, the chapel was open and the grating of the chancel alone was closed. In front of the altar the body of the victim, clothed in the dress of a novice, lay exposed. On each side of the altar and behind the grating leading to the convent the whole community of the Carmelites was assembled, listening to the sacred service and mingling their strains with the songs of the priests, without seeing the profane or being seen by them.

At the door of the chapel D'Artagnan felt his resolution wavering again and turned to look for Athos, but he had disappeared. Faithful to his mission of vengeance, Athos had been shown into the garden, and there on the gravel, following the light steps of that woman who had left a track of blood wherever she passed, he proceeded on until he reached the door which opened on the wood. He had this door unclosed and plunged into the forest. But there all his suspicions were confirmed. The road by which the carriage had disappeared skirted the wood. Athos followed the road for some distance with his eyes fixed upon the ground. Slight spots of blood, which proceeded from a wound inflicted either on the courier or on one of the horses, were perceptible on the road. About three-quarters of a league off, and fifty paces from Festubert, a large spot of blood was visible and the ground was trodden by horses. Between the wood and this denunciatory spot, and rather behind the tramped earth, traces of the same small steps as those in the garden were distinguished. The carriage, therefore, had waited here, and here Her Ladyship had left the wood and got into it.

Satisfied with this discovery, which confirmed all his conjectures, Athos returned to the hotel, where he found Planchet impatiently awaiting him. Everything had happened exactly as Athos had foreseen. Planchet had followed the path she had taken; had, like Athos,

observed the marks of blood; like Athos, too, he had discerned the spot where the carriage stopped. But he had gone on further than Athos; so that, in the village of Festubert, whilst drinking in a tavern, he had without the trouble of inquiry learned that at half-past eight on the previous evening a wounded man, who attended a lady traveling in a post-carriage, had been obliged to stop from inability to proceed further. The accident had been imputed to robbers who had stopped the carriage in the wood. The man had remained in the village, but the woman had changed horses and proceeded on her journey.

Planchet hunted out the postillion who had driven the carriage, and found him. He had taken the lady to Fromelles, and from Fromelles she had gone on toward Armentières. Planchet had taken a crossroad and at half-past seven in the morning he was at Armentières. There was only one hotel there and Planchet presented himself at it as a servant who was looking out for a situation. He had not talked ten minutes with the servants of the inn before he ascertained that a woman had arrived alone at ten o'clock the night before and had taken a room, had sent for the landlord and had told him that she wished to remain for some time in the neighborhood. Planchet wanted to know nothing more. He hastened to the place of appointment, found the three other valets at their posts, placed them as sentinels at all the outlets from the hotel, and returned to Athos, who had just finished receiving this information from Planchet when his friends returned.

All their faces were indicative of gloom, even the gentle countenance of Aramis.

"What must we do?" said D'Artagnan.

"Wait!" replied Athos.

Each retired to his own chamber.

At eight o'clock in the evening Athos ordered the horses to be saddled and notified Lord de Winter and his friends to prepare for the expedition. In an instant all the five were ready. Each looked at his arms and

put them in order. Athos came down the last and found D'Artagnan already mounted and impatient.

"Patience," said Athos; "there is still some one wanting."

The four horsemen looked around them in astonishment, for they sought in vain in their own minds who could be the one still wanting.

At this moment Planchet led up Athos's horse. The musketeer leaped lightly into the saddle.

"Wait for me," said he; "I shall be back directly." And he went off at a gallop.

A quarter of an hour afterward he returned, accompanied by a man who wore a mask and was wrapped in a red cloak. Lord de Winter and the three musketeers questioned one another by their glances, but none of them could give any information to the others, for all were ignorant about this man. And yet they concluded that it was as it ought to be, since it was Athos who had so arranged it.

At nine o'clock, guided by Planchet, the little cavalcade began its march, taking the same road that the carriage had followed. There was something mournful in the sight of these six men riding in silence, each buried in his own thoughts, melancholy as despair, gloomy as revenge.

CHAPTER LXV.

THE JUDGMENT.

It was a dark and stormy night. Large clouds chased each other across the heavens, veiling the brightness of the stars. The moon would not arise till midnight. Sometimes, by the light of a flash that lit up the horizon, the road became perceptible, stretching itself, white and solitary, before them; and then, the flash extinguished, everything was again dark. At every instant Athos was obliged to check D'Artagnan, who was always at the

head of the little troop, and compel him to take hi place in the ranks, which a moment later he quitte again. He had only one thought—to go forward—an he went.

They passed in silence through the village of Festubert where the wounded servant had been left, and ther they skirted the village of Richebourg. Having reache Herlier, Planchet, who guided the party, turned to th left.

On several occasions, either Lord de Winter or Porthos or Aramis had endeavored to address some remark to the man in the red cloak, but at each question he had bowed his head without reply. The travelers had thus comprehended that there was some reason for the stranger's silence and they had ceased to speak to him.

The storm, too, became more violent ; flashes rapidly succeeded one another ; the thunder began to roll, and the wind, the precursor of the hurricane, whistled through the plumes and the hair of the horsemen. The cavalcade broke into a fast trot. A little way beyond Fromelles the storm burst forth. There were still three leagues to travel, and they went them amidst torrents of rain.

D'Artagnan had taken off his hat, and did not wear his cloak. He found some pleasure in letting the water flow over his burning brow and over his body, consumed by burning fever.

At the moment that the little troop had passed beyond Goskal and was just arriving at the post-house, a man, who in the darkness could not be distinguished from the trunk of a tree, under which he had sheltered himself, advanced into the middle of the road, placing his finger on his lips. Athos recognized Grimaud.

" What is the matter now ? " exclaimed D'Artagnan. " Can she have quitted Armentières ? "

Grimaud gave an affirmative nod of the head. D'Artagnan ground his teeth.

" Silence, D'Artagnan ! " said Athos ; " I have taken charge of everything and it is my business, therefore, to question Grimaud."

"Where is she?" demanded Athos.

Grimaud stretched forth his hand in the direction of the Lys.

"Is it far from here?"

Grimaud presented his forefinger bent.

"Alone?" demanded Athos.

Grimaud made a sign that she was.

"Gentlemen," said Athos, "she is half a league from this place in the direction of the river."

"Good!" said D'Artagnan; "lead us on, Grimaud."

Grimaud took a crossroad and guided the cavalcade. At the end of about five hundred yards they found a stream, which they forded. By the light of a flash they perceived the village of Enguinghem.

"Is it there?" demanded D'Artagnan.

Grimaud shook his head negatively.

"Silence there!" said Athos.

The troop proceeded on its way. Another flash blazed forth; Grimaud extended his arm, and by the bluish light of the serpentine flame a small solitary house was perceptible on the bank of the river, not far from a ferry. There was a light at one window.

"We are there," said Athos.

At that moment a man who was lying down in a ditch arose. It was Musqueton. He pointed with his finger to the window with the light. "She is there," said he.

"And Bazin?" demanded Athos.

"Whilst I watched the window he watched the door."

"Good!" said Athos. "You are all faithful servants."

Athos leaped from his horse, of which he gave the bridle into the hands of Grimaud, and advanced in the direction of the window after having made a sign to the remainder of the troop to proceed toward the door.

The small house was surrounded by a quickset hedge of two or three feet in height. Athos sprang over the hedge and went up to the window, which had no shutters on the outside, but of which the short curtains were closely drawn. He climbed upon the ledge of the stone that his eye might be above the level of the curtains.

By the light of a lamp he could perceive a woman covered by a dark-colored cloak, seated on a stool before a dying fire. Her elbows were placed upon a wretched table and she rested her head on her hands, which were as white as ivory. Her face was not visible, but an inauspicious smile rose upon the lips of Athos. He was not mistaken. He had, in truth, found the woman that he sought.

At this moment a horse neighed. Her Ladyship raised her head, saw the pale face of Athos staring through the window, and screamed out.

Perceiving that he had been seen, Athos pushed the window with his hand and knee; it gave way; the panes were broken, and Athos, like a spectre of vengeance, leaped into the room. Her Ladyship ran to the door and opened it. Paler and more threatening than even Athos himself, D'Artagnan was standing on the sill. Her Ladyship started back and screamed. D'Artagnan, imagining that she had some means of flight and fearing that she might escape him, drew out a pistol from his belt. But Athos raised his hand.

"Replace your weapon, D'Artagnan," said he; "it is imperative that this woman should be judged and not assassinated. Wait awhile, D'Artagnan, and you shall be satisfied. Come in, gentlemen."

D'Artagnan obeyed, for Athos had the solemn voice and authoritative air of a judge commissioned by the Deity Himself. Behind D'Artagnan there came Porthos, Aramis, Lord de Winter, and the man in the red cloak. The four valets watched at the door and window. Her Ladyship had sunk upon her chair with her hands stretched out, as if to exorcise this terrible apparition. On seeing her brother-in-law she uttered a fearful scream.

"What do you want?" demanded Her Ladyship.

"We seek," said Athos, "Charlotte Backson, who was called, first, the Countess de la Fère, then Lady de Winter, baroness of Sheffield."

"I am that person," murmured she, overwhelmed with fear. "What do you want with me?"

"We want to judge you according to your crimes," said Athos. "You will be free to defend yourself and to justify your conduct, if you can. M. d'Artagnan, you must be the first accuser."

D'Artagnan came forward. "Before God and men," said he, "I accuse this woman of having poisoned Constance Bonancieux, who died last night."

He turned toward Aramis and Porthos. "We can bear witness to it," said the two musketeers at the same time.

D'Artagnan continued:

"Before God and before men I accuse this woman of having wished to poison me with some wine which she sent me from Villeroi, with a forged letter, as if the wine had come from my friends. God preserved me, but a man named Brisemont was killed instead of me."

"We bear witness to this," said Porthos and Aramis, as with one voice.

"Before God and before men," continued D'Artagnan, "I accuse this woman of having urged me to the murder of the Baron de Wardes; and as no one is present to bear witness to it, I myself will attest it. I have done." And D'Artagnan crossed over to the other side of the room, with Porthos and Aramis.

"It is now for you to speak, my lord," said Athos.

The baron came forward in his turn. "Before God and before men," said he, "I accuse this woman of having caused the Duke of Buckingham to be assassinated."

"The Duke of Buckingham assassinated!" exclaimed all, with one accord.

"Yes," said the baron, "assassinated. From the warning letter which you sent me I caused this woman to be arrested and put her under the custody of a faithful follower. She corrupted that man; she placed the dagger in his hand; she made him kill the duke; and at this moment, perhaps, Felton has paid with his head for the crimes of this fury."

A shudder ran through the company at the revelation of these hitherto unknown crimes.

"This is not all," resumed Lord de Winter. "My brother, who had made you his heiress, died in three hours of a strange malady, which left livid spots on his body. Sister, how did your husband die?"

"Oh, horror!" exclaimed Porthos and Aramis.

"Murderess of Buckingham; murderess of Felton; murderess of my brother, I demand justice on you and declare that if it be not accorded to me I will execute it myself."

Lord de Winter ranged himself by the side of D'Artagnan, leaving his place open to another accuser.

Her Ladyship's head sank upon her hands, and she endeavored to recall her thoughts, which were confused by a deadly giddiness.

"It is now my turn," said Athos, trembling, as the lion trembles at the aspect of a serpent. "It is now my turn. I married this woman when she was a young girl. I married her in spite of all my family. I gave her my property, I gave her my name, and one day I discovered that this woman was branded—this woman bore the mark of a fleur-de-lis upon the left shoulder."

"Oh!" said Her Ladyship, rising, "I defy you to find the tribunal which pronounced on me that infamous sentence—I defy you to find the man who executed it."

"Silence!" exclaimed a voice. "It is for me to answer that!" And the man in the red cloak came forward.

"Who is that man? What is that man?" cried out Her Ladyship, suffocated with terror, and with her hair raising itself on her head, as if it had been endowed with life.

Every eye was turned toward that man, for he was unknown to all except Athos. And even Athos looked at him with as much astonishment as the others, for he knew not how he could be connected with the horrible drama which was at that moment enacting there. After slowly and solemnly approaching Her Ladyship, till the table alone separated them, the stranger took off his mask.

Her Ladyship looked for some time with increasing terror at that pale countenance, begirt with black hair, of which the only expression was that of a stern and frozen insensibility; then, suddenly rising and retreating toward the wall,—

"Oh! no, no," exclaimed she, "it is an infernal apparition! It is not he. Help! help!" she screamed but, in a hoarse voice, still pressing toward the wall as if she could open a passage through it with her hands.

"But who are you?" exclaimed all the witnesses of this scene.

"Ask this woman," said the man in the red cloak, "for you see plainly that she has recognized me."

"The executioner of Lille, the executioner of Lille!" cried Milady, overcome by wild affright and clinging to the wall with her hands for support.

All of them recoiled and the tall man stood alone in the middle of the room.

"Oh! mercy! mercy!" cried the miserable woman, falling on her knees.

The stranger paused for silence. "I told you truly that she had recognized me," said he. "Yes, I am the executioner of Lille and here is my history."

All eyes were fixed upon this man, whose words were listened to with the most anxious avidity.

"This woman was formerly a young girl, as beautiful as she is at present. She was a nun, in a Benedictine convent at Templemar. A young priest of a simple and credulous nature performed service in the church of the convent; she attempted to seduce him and succeeded. She would have seduced a saint.

"The vows which they had both taken were sacred and irrevocable. She persuaded him to quit the country; but, to quit the country, to fly together, to get to some part of France where they might live in peace, because they would be unknown, they required money. Neither of them had any. The priest stole the sacred vessels and sold them, but just as they were making

ready to escape, they were both arrested. Eight days afterward she had corrupted the jailer's son and saved herself. The young priest was condemned to be branded and to ten years of chains. I was the executioner of Lille, as this woman says. I was obliged to brand the criminal, and that criminal was my own brother! I then swore that this woman who had ruined him—who was more than his accomplice, since she had instigated him to the crime—should at any rate partake his punishment. I suspected where she was concealed. I followed and discovered her. I caught her, I bound her and imprinted the same brand on her that I had stamped upon my own brother.

"The next day, on my return to Lille, my brother also managed to escape. I was accused as his accomplice and was condemned to remain in prison in his place, so long as he should continue at large. My poor brother was not aware of this sentence; he had rejoined this woman, and they fled together into Berri; here he obtained a small curacy. This woman passed for his sister. The owner of the estate to which the curacy belonged saw this pretended sister and fell in love with her. His passion led him to propose to marry her. She left the man whom she had destroyed and became the Countess de la Fère."

All eyes were turned toward Athos, whose true name this was, and he made a sign that the executioner's tale was true.

"Then," continued the latter, "maddened by despair, and resolved to terminate an existence of which the happiness and honor had been thus destroyed, my poor brother returned to Lille, and hearing the sentence which had condemned me in his place, he delivered himself up as a prisoner and hung himself the same night to the grating of his dungeon. After all, to do them justice, they who had condemned me kept their word. Scarcely was the identity of the dead body proved before my liberty was restored. These are the crimes of which I accuse her—these are my reasons for branding her!"

"M. d'Artagnan," said Athos, "what is the punishment that you demand against this woman?"

"The punishment of death!" replied D'Artagnan.

"My Lord de Winter," continued Athos, "what punishment do you demand against this woman?"

"Death!" replied his lordship.

"Messieurs Porthos and Aramis," said Athos, "you who are her judges, what punishment do you pronounce against this woman?"

"The punishment of death!" replied the two musketeers, in a hollow voice.

Her Ladyship uttered a fearful cry and dragged herself a few paces on her knees toward her judges. Athos stretched out his hand toward her. "Charlotte Backson," said he, "Countess de la Fère, Lady de Winter, your crimes have wearied men on earth and God in heaven. If you know any prayer, repeat it, for you are condemned and are about to die."

At these words, which left no hope, Her Ladyship raised herself to her full height and attempted to speak. But her voice failed her. She felt a strong and pitiless hand seize her by the hair and drag her on, as irrevocably as fate drags on mankind. She did not, therefore, even attempt to make any resistance, but left the cottage.

Lord de Winter and the four friends went out after her. The valets followed their masters and the chamber was left empty, with its window, its open door and the smoking lamp burning sadly on the table.

CHAPTER LXVI.

THE EXECUTION.

It was almost midnight. The waning moon, as red as blood from the lingering traces of the storm, was rising behind the little village of Armentières, which exhibited

in that pale light the gloomy profile of its houses and the skeleton of its high ornamented steeple. In front the Lys rolled along its waters like a river of molten fire whilst on its other bank a dark mass of trees was sharply outlined upon a stormy sky, covered by large copper colored clouds, which created a sort of twilight in the middle of the night. To the left arose an old deserted mill, of which the sails were motionless and from the ruins of which an owl was uttering its sharp, monotonous recurring screech. Here and there on the plain, to the right and to the left of the path which the melancholy band was taking, there appeared a few short and stunted trees, which looked like distorted dwarfs crouched down to watch the men at that ill-omened hour.

From time to time a brilliant flash opened up the horizon in its whole extent, playing above the black mass of trees, and coming, like a frightful cimeter, to divide the sky and water into equal parts. Not a breath of air was stirring in the heavy atmosphere. A silence as of death weighed down all nature. The earth was moist and slippery from the recent rain, and reanimated plants sent forth their perfumes with more vigorous energy.

Two of the servants, each holding an arm, were leading Her Ladyship along. The executioner walked behind. The four musketeers and Lord de Winter followed him.

Planchet and Bazin brought up the rear.

The two valets led Her Ladyship toward the side of the river. Her mouth was silent, but her eyes were inexpressibly eloquent, supplicating by turns each of those on whom she looked. Finding herself a few paces in advance, she said to the valets :

" A thousand pistoles for each of you, if you will assist me to escape ; but if you give me up to your masters I have some avengers near, who will make you pay dearly for my death."

Grimaud hesitated and Musqueton trembled in every limb.

Athos, who had heard Her Ladyship's voice, came up immediately, as did also Lord de Winter.

"Send away these valets," said he; "she has spoken to them and they are no longer safe."

They called Planchet and Bazin, who took the places of Grimaud and Musqueton.

Having reached the brink of the stream, the executioner came up and bound Her Ladyship's hands and feet.

She then broke her silence to exclaim: "You are cowards—you are miserable assassins! You come, ten of you, to murder a poor woman! But beware! If I am not succored, I shall be avenged."

"You are not a woman," replied Athos, coldly; "you do not belong to the human race; you are a demon escaped from hell, and to hell we shall send you back."

"Oh, you virtuous gentlemen!" said Her Ladyship, "remember that he amongst you who touches a hair of my head is himself a murderer."

"The executioner can kill without being on that account a murderer, madame," said the man in the cloak, striking his large sword. "He is the last judge on earth, that is all. *Nachrichter*, as our German neighbors say."

And as he was binding her whilst he uttered these words, Her Ladyship sent forth two or three wild screams, which had a startling, melancholy effect, as they were borne on the night and lost themselves in the depths of the woods.

"But if I am guilty—if I have committed the crimes of which you accuse me," howled out Her Ladyship, "take me before a regular tribunal. You are not judges—you have no power to condemn me!"

"I did propose Tyburn," answered Lord de Winter; "why did you not accept my offer?"

"Because I do not wish to die," exclaimed Her Ladyship, struggling; "because I am too young to die!"

"The woman whom you poisoned at Bethune was still

younger than you are, madame, and yet she is dead," said D'Artagnan.

"I will enter a convent—I will become a nun," cried Her Ladyship.

"You were in a convent," said the executioner, "and you left it to destroy my brother."

Her Ladyship sent forth a cry of terror and fell upon her knees. The executioner lifted her in his arms and prepared to carry her to the boat.

"Oh, my God!" exclaimed she, "my God! are you going to drown me?"

These cries had something so heartrending in them that D'Artagnan, who was at first the most unrelenting in his pursuit of Her Ladyship, sunk down upon the stump of a tree, letting his head fall on his bosom and stopping his ears with the palms of his hands; and yet in spite of all this he still heard her menaces and cries. D'Artagnan was the youngest of all these men and his heart failed him.

"Oh! I cannot bear this frightful spectacle," said he; "I cannot consent that this woman should die thus."

Her Ladyship heard these words and they gave her a new gleam of hope. "D'Artagnan! D'Artagnan!" exclaimed she, "remember that once I loved you!"

The young man rose and made one step toward her. But Athos drew his sword and placed himself in his path.

"If you take one step more, D'Artagnan," said he, "we must cross our swords together."

D'Artagnan fell on his knees and prayed.

"Come," continued Athos, "executioner, do your duty."

"Willingly, my lord," replied the executioner; "for as truly as I am a good Catholic I firmly believe that I act justly in exercising my office on this woman."

"That is right." Athos took one step toward Her Ladyship. "I pardon you," said he, "the evil you have done me. I forgive you for my ruined future, my lost honor, my tainted love and my salvation forever

periled by the despair into which you have thrown me. Die in peace ! "

Lord de Winter next came forward. " I pardon you," said he, " the poisoning of my brother, the assassination of the Duke of Buckingham and the death of poor Felton. I forgive you your attempts on my own person. Die in peace."

" As for me," said D'Artagnan, " pardon me, madame, for having by a deceit unworthy of a gentleman provoked your rage ; and in exchange I pardon you for the murder of my poor friend and your cruel vengeance on myself. I pardon and I pity you. Die in peace ! "

" *I am lost !* " murmured Her Ladyship in English ; " *I must die !* "

She then arose by herself and threw around her one of those clear glances which seemed to emanate from an eye of fire, but she could see nothing. She listened, but she heard nothing. There were none around her but her enemies.

" Where am I to die ? " demanded she.

" On the other bank of the river," replied the executioner.

He then made her enter the boat, and as he was stepping in after her Athos gave him a sum of money.

" Here," said he, " here is the price of the execution, that it may be seen that we are really judges."

" It is well," said the executioner ; " but let this woman now know that I am not executing business, but my duty." And he threw the money from him into the river.

" Mark," said Athos, " this woman has a child, and yet she has not said one word about him."

The boat proceeded toward the left bank of the Lys, carrying away the criminal and the executioner. All the others continued on the right bank, where they had sunk upon their knees. The boat glided slowly along the rope of the ferry, under the reflection of a pale mist which skimmed the water at that moment.

It arrived at the other bank and the two figures stood out in blackness on the red horizon.

During the passage Her Ladyship had managed to loosen the cord that bound her feet, and on reaching the bank she leaped lightly on shore and took to flight. But the ground was moist and at the top of the shelving bank she slipped and fell upon her knees. Probably a superstitious idea had struck her. She understood that Heaven refused to aid her and remained in the attitude in which she had fallen, her head drooping and her hands clasped together. Then from the other shore they could see the executioner slowly raise his two arms, a ray of the moon was reflected on the blade of his large sword, the two arms descended, they heard the whistling of the cimeter and the cry of the victim, and then a mutilated mass sunk down beneath the blow. The executioner took off his red cloak, stretched it out on the ground, laid the body on it and threw in the head, tied it by the four corners, raised it upon his shoulders and again entered the boat. Having reached the middle of the Lys, he stopped the boat, and holding his burden over the river :

" Let the justice of God have its course ! " he exclaimed in a loud voice. And so saying, he dropped the dead body into the deepest part of the waters, which closed above it.

CHAPTER LXVII.

A MESSAGE FROM THE CARDINAL.

THREE days afterward the four musketeers re-entered Paris. They were within the limit of their leave, and the same evening they went to pay the usual visit to M. de Treville.

" Well, gentlemen," inquired the brave captain, " have you found good amusements in your excursion ? "

" Prodigiously so," replied Athos, in his own name and that of his companions.

On the sixth of the following month the king, according to his promise to the cardinal to return to Rochelle, quitted Paris, still quite stunned by the news of the assassination of Buckingham, which was beginning to circulate in the city.

Although warned of a danger in the path of a man whom she had so truly loved, yet the queen, when his death was announced to her, would not believe it; she had even the imprudence to exclaim: "It is false! he has just written to me."

But the next day there was no refusing credence to this fatal news. Laporte, having, like every one else, been detained by the order of Charles I., at length arrived and brought with him the last dying gift which Buckingham had sent to the queen.

The king's joy had been extreme. He had not taken the slightest pains to disguise it, but manifested it affectedly before the queen. Louis XIII., like all men of weak hearts, was wanting in generosity. But the king soon again became melancholy and ill. His brow was not one of those that can long continue unruffled; he felt that in returning to the camp he returned to slavery, and yet he did return there. The cardinal was to him the fascinating serpent, and he was the bird that flies from bough to bough without a possibility of making his escape.

The return to La Rochelle was, therefore, profoundly sad. Our four friends, especially, excited the astonishment of their companions; they traveled side by side, with heavy eyes and heads depressed. Athos alone sometimes raised his broad forehead; a glance shot from his eye, a bitter smile passed across his lips, and then like his comrades he sunk again into his reveries. As soon as they arrived in any town, after they had conducted the king to his apartments, the four friends withdrew either to their own lodgings or to some secluded tavern, where they neither played nor drank, but spoke in a low voice together and looked attentively that none might hear them.

One day that the king had halted to hunt the magpie, and the four friends, according to their custom, instead of joining in the sport, had stopped at a tavern by the roadside, a man who was coming post from La Rochelle, stopped at the door to drink a glass of wine, and looked into the chamber where the four musketeers were seated at the table.

"Halloo, M. d'Artagnan," said he, "is it you that I see there?"

D'Artagnan raised his head and uttered an exclamation of joy. This man who now called him was his phantom; it was the stranger of Meung, of the Rue des Fossoyeurs and of Arras. D'Artagnan drew his sword and rushed toward the door. But on this occasion the stranger, instead of hastening away, jumped off his horse and advanced to meet D'Artagnan.

"Ah! sir," said the young man, "I meet you at last. This time you shall not escape me."

"It is not my intention either, sir, for I am looking for you this time. In the king's name I arrest you."

"What do you mean?" exclaimed D'Artagnan.

"I say that you must give up your sword to me, sir, and without resistance, too. Your life depends upon it, I assure you."

"Who are you, then?" demanded D'Artagnan, lowering his sword, but not yet giving it up.

"I am the Chevalier de Rochefort," said the stranger, "the Cardinal de Richelieu's master of the horse, and I am commanded to conduct you before his eminence."

"We are now returning to his eminence, sir," said Athos, coming forward, "and you must take M. d'Artagnan's word that he will go direct to La Rochelle."

"I ought to place him in the hands of the guards who will conduct him back to the camp."

"We will serve as such, sir, on our words as gentlemen! But on our words as gentlemen, also," continued Athos, frowning, "M. d'Artagnan shall not be taken from us."

De Rochefort threw a glance around him and saw that

Porthos and Aramis had placed themselves between him and the door, and he understood that he was entirely at the mercy of these four men. "Gentlemen," said he, "if M. d'Artagnan will deliver up his sword and join his word to yours, I shall be content with your promise of conducting him to the quarters of his eminence the cardinal."

"You have my word, sir, and here is my sword," said D'Artagnan.

"That suits me so much the better," said Rochefort, "for I must continue my journey."

"If it is to rejoin Milady," said Athos, coolly, "it is useless; you will not find her."

"And what has become of her?" asked Rochefort, anxiously.

"Return to the camp and you will learn!"

Rochefort remained in thought for an instant; and then, as they were only one day's journey from Surgeres, where the cardinal was to meet the king, he resolved to follow Athos's advice and to return with them. Besides, this plan had the further advantage of enabling him personally to watch the prisoner. Thus they proceeded on their way.

The next day at three in the afternoon they reached Surgeres. The cardinal was waiting there for Louis XIII. The minister and the king exchanged their caresses freely and congratulated each other on the happy chance which had freed France from the inveterate enemy who was arming Europe against her. After this the cardinal, who had been informed by Rochefort that D'Artagnan had been arrested, and who was eager to examine him, took leave of the king, inviting his majesty to go the next day to see the works at the embankment, which were at last complete.

On returning in the evening to his quarters near the Pont de Pierre, the cardinal found the three musketeers, all armed, and D'Artagnan, who was without his sword, standing before the door of the house which he inhabited. On this occasion, as he was in full force, he

looked sternly at them and made a sign with his eye and hand for D'Artagnan to follow him.

" We will wait for you, D'Artagnan," said Athos, loud enough for the cardinal to hear.

His eminence knitted his brow, stopped for an instant, and then went on without uttering a single word.

D'Artagnan entered behind the cardinal and Rochefort followed D'Artagnan ; the door was guarded. His eminence entered the chamber which he used as a cabinet, and signed to Rochefort to introduce the young musketeer. Rochefort obeyed and retired.

D'Artagnan stood alone before the cardinal. It was his second interview with Richelieu, and he afterward confessed that he felt quite convinced that it was to be his last. Richelieu remained leaning upon the chimney-piece, and there was a table standing between him and D'Artagnan.

" Sir," said the cardinal, " you have been arrested by my orders."

" I have been informed so, my lord."

" Do you know why ? "

" No, my lord ; for the only thing for which I ought to be arrested is yet unknown to your eminence."

Richelieu looked earnestly at the young man.

" Halloo ! " said he, " what does this mean ? "

" If your eminence will first tell me the charges against me, I will afterward tell you what I have done."

" There are crimes imputed to you which have cost the heads of people far higher than you are," replied the cardinal.

" And what are they, my lord ? " demanded D'Artagnan, with a calmness which surprised even the cardinal himself.

" You are accused of corresponding with the enemies of the realm ; of having pried into state secrets ; and of having attempted to make our general's plans miscarry."

" And who is my accuser, my lord ? " inquired D'Artagnan, who had no doubt that it was Her Ladyship,

" a woman branded by the justice of her country—a woman who was married to one man in France, and to another in England—a woman who poisoned her second husband, and attempted to poison me ! "

" What are you saying, sir ? " exclaimed the astonished cardinal, " and of what woman are you thus speaking ? "

" Of Lady de Winter," replied D'Artagnan ; " yes, of Lady de Winter—of whose crimes your eminence was undoubtedly ignorant when you honored her with your confidence."

" Sir," replied the cardinal, " if Lady de Winter has been guilty of the crimes you have mentioned, she shall be punished."

" She *is* punished, my lord."

" And who has punished her ? "

" We have."

" She is in prison, then ? "

" She is dead."

" Dead ! " repeated the cardinal, who could not credit what he heard ; " dead ! Did you not say that she was dead ? "

" Three times had she endeavored to kill me and I forgave her, but she murdered the woman I loved, and then my friends and I seized her, tried her, and condemned her."

D'Artagnan then related the poisoning of Madame Bonancieux in the Carmelite Convent at Bethune, the trial in the solitary house and the execution on the banks of the Lys.

A shudder ran throughout the frame of the cardinal, who did not shudder easily. But suddenly, as if from the influence of some silent thought, his dark countenance became gradually clearer and at last attained perfect serenity.

" So," said he, in a voice, the gentleness of which contrasted strangely with the severity of his words, " you constituted yourselves the judges, without considering that those who are not legally appointed and who punish without authority are assassins."

"My lord, I swear to you that I have not for one instant thought of defending my head against your eminence. I will submit to whatever punishment your eminence may please to inflict. I do not value life sufficiently to fear death."

"Yes, I know it; you are a man of courage, sir," said the cardinal in a voice almost affectionate. "I may, therefore, tell you beforehand that you will be tried and even condemned."

"Another might reply to your eminence that he had his pardon in his pocket. I content myself with saying —command, my lord, and I am ready."

"Your pardon!" said Richelieu in surprise.

"Yes, my lord," replied D'Artagnan.

"And signed by whom? By the king?" The cardinal pronounced these words with a singular expression of contempt.

"No; by your eminence."

"By me? You are mad, sir!"

"Your eminence will undoubtedly recognize your own writing?"

And D'Artagnan presented to the cardinal the precious paper which Athos had extorted from Her Ladyship and which he had given to D'Artagnan to serve him as a safeguard.

The cardinal took the paper and read in a very slow voice and dwelling upon each syllable:

"It is by my order and for the good of the state that the bearer of this has done what he has done.

"RICHELIEU."

The cardinal, after having read these lines, fell into a profound reverie, but did not return the paper to D'Artagnan.

"He is deciding by what kind of punishment I am to die," said the Gascon to himself. "Well, faith! he shall see how a gentleman can die." The young musketeer was in an excellent frame of mind for ending his career heroically.

Richelieu continued his meditation, rolling and unrolling the paper in his hand. At last he raised his head, and fixing his eagle eye upon that loyal, open and intelligent countenance, read upon that face, all furrowed with tears, the sufferings which had been endured within a month, and he then thought, for the third or fourth time, what futurity might have in store for such a youth of barely twenty years of age, and what resources his activity and courage and intelligence might offer to a good master. On the other side, the crimes, the power, the almost infernal genius of Her Ladyship had more than once alarmed him, and he felt a secret joy at being forever freed from so dangerous an accomplice. He slowly tore up the paper that D'Artagnan had so generously returned to him.

"I am lost!" said D'Artagnan in his own heart.

The cardinal approached the table and, without sitting down, wrote some words on a parchment, of which two-thirds were already filled up, and then fixed his seal upon it.

"That is my condemnation," thought D'Artagnan; "he spares me the misery of the Bastile and the details of a trial. It is really very kind of him."

"Here, sir," said the cardinal to the young man; "I took one *carte-blanche* from you and I give you another. The name is not inserted in the commission; you will write it yourself."

D'Artagnan took the paper with hesitation and cast his eyes upon it. It was the commission of a lieutenancy in the musketeers. D'Artagnan fell at the cardinal's feet.

"My lord," said he, "my life is yours; make use of it henceforth; but this favor which you bestow upon me is beyond my merits; I have three friends who are more worthy of it."

"You are a brave youth, D'Artagnan," said the cardinal, tapping him familiarly on the shoulder, in his delight at having conquered that rebellious nature; "do what you like with this commission, as the

name is omitted; only remember that it is to you I give it."

"Your eminence may rest assured," said D'Artagnan "that I will never forget it."

The cardinal turned and said aloud:

"Rochefort!"

The chevalier, who had undoubtedly been behind the door, immediately entered.

"Rochefort," said the cardinal, "you see M. d'Artagnan? I receive him into the number of my friends. Embrace one another and behave yourselves, if you wish to keep your heads."

D'Artagnan and Rochefort embraced coldly, but the cardinal was watching them with his vigilant eye. They left the room at the same moment.

"We shall meet again," they both said, "shall we not?"

"Whenever you please," said D'Artagnan.

"The opportunity will come," replied Rochefort.

"Hum!" said Richelieu, opening the door.

The two men bowed to his eminence, smiled and pressed each other's hands.

"We began to be impatient," said Athos.

"Here I am, my friends," replied D'Artagnan.

"Free?"

"Not only free, but in favor."

"You must tell us all about it."

"Yes, this evening. But for the present let us separate."

In fact, in the evening D'Artagnan went to Athos's lodgings and found him emptying a bottle of Spanish wine, an occupation which he pursued religiously every night. He told him all that had taken place between the cardinal and himself, and drew the commission from his pocket.

"Here, dear Athos," said he, "here is something which naturally belongs to you."

Athos smiled, with his soft and gentle smile.

"Friend," said he, "it is too much for Athos—for the

Count de la Fère it is too little. Keep this commission ; it belongs to you. Alas ! you have bought it dear enough ! "

D'Artagnan left Athos's room and went to Porthos.

He found him clad in a most magnificent coat, covered with splendid embroidery, and admiring himself in a glass.

" Ah ! is it you, my friend ? " said Porthos ; " how do you think this dress suits me ? "

" Beautifully," replied D'Artagnan ; " but I am going to offer you one which will become you still more."

" What is it ? " demanded Porthos.

" That of lieutenant of the musketeers." And D'Artagnan, having related to Porthos his interview with the cardinal, drew the commission from his pocket. " Here," said he, " write your name upon it, and be a kind officer to me."

Porthos glanced over the commission and returned it, to the great astonishment of the young man.

" Yes," said Porthos, " that would flatter me very much, but I could not long enjoy the favor. During our expedition to Bethune the husband of my duchess died ; so that, my dear boy, as the strong-box of the defunct is holding out its arms to me, I marry the widow. You see I am fitting on my wedding garments. So keep the lieutenancy, my dear fellow—keep it." And he returned it to D'Artagnan.

The young man then repaired to Aramis. He found him kneeling before an oratory, with his forehead leaning on an open book of prayers. He told him also of his interview with the cardinal, and for the third time taking the commission from his pocket :

" You, our friend, our light, our invisible protector," said he, " accept this commission ; you have deserved it more than any by your wisdom and your counsels, always followed by such fortunate results."

" Alas ! dear friend," said Aramis, " our last adventures have entirely disgusted me with a soldier's life. My decision is this time irrevocable. After the siege I

shall enter the Lazaristes. Keep the commission, D'Artagnan. The profession of arms suits you; you will be a brave and adventurous captain."

D'Artagnan, with an eye moist with gratitude and brilliant with joy, returned to Athos, whom he found still seated at table, admiring his last glass of Malaga by the light of his lamp.

"Well," said he, "they have both refused it."

"It is, dear friend, because no one is more worthy of it than yourself."

He took a pen, and wrote the name of D'Artagnan upon it and gave it back to him.

"I shall no longer have my friends, then," said the young man. "Alas! nothing, henceforth, but bitter recollections." And he let his head fall between his hands, whilst two tears rolled along his cheeks.

"You are young," said Athos, "and your bitter recollections have time to change into tender remembrances."

EPILOGUE.

La Rochelle, deprived of the assistance of the English fleet, and of the succor which had been promised by Buckingham, surrendered after a year's siege. On the twenty-eighth of October, 1628, the capitulation was signed.

The king entered Paris on the twenty-third of December of the same year. He was received in triumph, as though he had subdued an enemy instead of Frenchmen. He passed under green arches through the suburb of Saint-Jacques.

D'Artagnan took his promotion. Porthos left the service and married Madame Coquenard in the course of the following year. The strong-box, so much coveted contained eight hundred thousand livres. Musqueton had a superb livery and enjoyed the satisfaction, which he had desired all his life, of riding behind a gilded carriage.

Aramis, after a journey to Lorraine, suddenly disappeared and ceased to write to his friends. They learned afterward, through Madame de Chevreuse, that he had assumed the cowl in a monastery at Nancy. Bazin became a lay brother.

Athos remained a musketeer under D'Artagnan's command, until 1633, at which time, after a journey to Roussillon, he also left the service under pretext of having succeeded to a small inheritance in the Blaisois. Grimaud followed Athos.

D'Artagnan fought three times with Rochefort, and three times wounded him.

"I shall probably kill you the fourth time," said he to Rochefort, as he stretched forth a hand to raise him up.

"It would be better for both of us to stop where we are," replied the wounded man. "Egad! I have been more your friend than your enemy, for after our first meeting I could have got your head off by one word to the cardinal."

They embraced, but this time it was in sincerity and without malice.

Planchet obtained, through Rochefort, the rank of sergeant in the regiment of Piedmont.

M. Bonancieux lived in great tranquillity, entirely ignorant of what had become of his wife and not disturbing himself about her. One day he had the imprudence to recall himself to the cardinal's recollection. The cardinal told him that he would so provide for him that he should never want anything for the future. In fact, the next day, M. Bonancieux having left home at seven o'clock in the evening, to go to the Louvre, was never seen again in the Rue des Fossoyeurs. The opinion of those who thought themselves the best informed was, that he was boarded and lodged in some royal castle at the expense of his generous eminence.

THE END.

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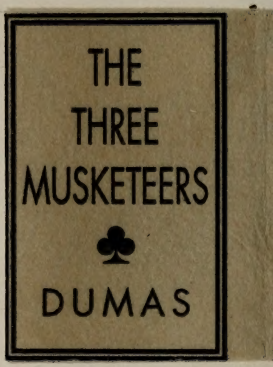
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